

SUPER-SCIENCE

AUGUST

35c



FICTION

THREE SURVIVED

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

by ROBERT BLOCH



DANGEROUS IDEAS

Recently, the Soviet Government ordered the expulsion of an American news correspondent stationed in Moscow. He was charged with "spreading Anti-Soviet literature." Specifically, he was giving science fiction magazines away free to eager Russian teen-agers.

From their point of view, the Russians were right to expell him—because he was attacking the Soviet system with a weapon more deadly than the hydrogen bomb. *Ideas* were his weapon—and in Russia ideas are dangerous.

Ideas are what science fiction thrives on. Ideas are what the readers of science fiction react to. The free play of ideas is what makes men and women think; and such thinking can lead to far reaching social changes for the better, or worse.

The very fact that the Russian teen-agers were eager to read science fiction magazines meant that they were eager for the thrill of using their intellects. The Iron Curtain exists for the purpose of shutting out new ideas from the Russians, old and young alike. Science fiction could crack the Iron Curtain!

In America, science fiction magazines can be found on every newsstand. The readers of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION are free to think, free to develop their own ideas from the brilliant and mentally stimulating stories to be found in its pages. Are these ideas dangerous to existing established thought? We hope so!

W. W. SCOTT

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

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THREE SURVIVED

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

NOVELETTE

illustrated by BOWMAN

At first Roy thought his two companions were going to be just dead weight in the fight to survive from the spaceship wreck. They had no scientific skills at all

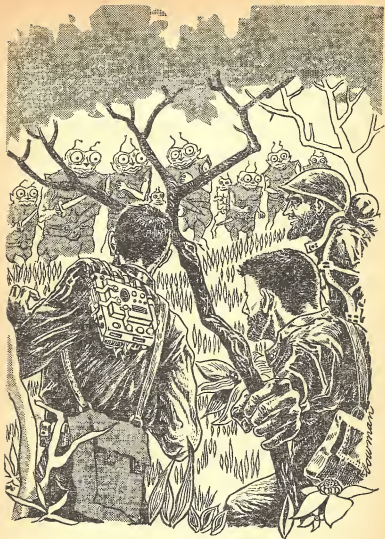
ABOARD the spaceship *Clyde Bohmer*, en route from Rigel IV to the Capella Orbiter via transspace hop, all hell had broken loose. The ship had blinked suddenly out of ultra-drive with an eyeball-jarring wrench and had drifted slowly into the system of a small golden-yellow G-type sun. A moment later, whatever it was that had given up the ghost in the drive compartment expired noisily, blasting away the nose of the ship.

Efficiently, the cybernetic governors slid the emergency partitions over the wounded section, but not before two ruptured bulkheads had yielded up the air they had penned in. In

his cabin just below Navigation Deck, Spatial Engineer Roy Kilbourne dialed *Info* and waited while the audio banks of the ship's computer fed him a precise account of the accident as reported by the scanning pickups.

"...failure in main drive generator, leading to destruction of nose section *in toto*." The computer always had had a fondness for Latin, Kilbourne thought irrelevantly.

The computer hummed for an instant and went on: "Air loss serious in Sections 8 and 9; compensation has been made but human inhabitants are suffering acute anoxia. Eight men *in extremis* there. Officer's



bridge destroyed; no survivors known. Engine room destroyed; several survivors. Passengers generally unharmed, though deaths are observable. Radon clouds causing hazard in lower levels of ship. Life-ships 3, 7, 8 are unusable. Computer section functioning and—"

The report would continue until the end of the emergency, but Kilbourne snapped the set off. He had the data he needed in order to act.

The ship was a wreck; of the thirty-eight men who had been aboard when they left Rigel, possibly ten were still alive. Kilbourne counted up on his fingers: six officers, all dead. Twelve passengers, "generally unharmed." In the engine-room, "several survivors." Eight of the twenty crewmen were as good as dead in Sections 8 and 9. The ship was crippled, and the only thing to do was to get off it and strike out for the nearest rescue signal beacon planet.

Kilbourne knew where the lifeships were, but he had two stops to make first. He himself was inconsequential to the

voyage, he knew, being merely an engineer transferring from the Rigel yards to do flight research at the artificial satellite in the Capella system. But he was a level-headed, logical man, and he knew the most important action he could ever perform in his life would be to rescue the two valuable things aboard ship: Professor David Loder, Earth's outstanding gravitonic physicist, and the cargo of antivirotic drugs in Number Six Hold. Both were of vital importance to humanity.

Loder first, Kilbourne thought. The diminutive physicist was in Cabin Fifteen, up the companionway and around. Kilbourne pushed open his cabin door and was promptly greeted by a billowing roll of oily gray smoke. *Radon*, he thought in sudden alarm, then realized there was little danger from the radioactive gas this far from the drives. It was smoke, pure and simple—and it meant the ship was now on fire, along with its other woes.

CHOKING and gasping, Kilbourne made his way

through the smoke to Cabin Fifteen, and banged on the plasteel door. No answer came. He banged again, waited a moment, then shoved the door open.

"Professor Loder!" he called.

Loder was there, all right. Kilbourne saw the small, white-haired man huddled at his desk, a pencil clutched tightly in his dead fingers. He had been at work when the shift out of ultradrive had come. The jarring shock had been too much for the fragile old man.

Damn damn damn, Kilbourne thought. For a moment he felt frustration of a type quite new to him, and he stood there, trying to call the scientist back from the dead. He shook the bony arm, and Loder's head wobbled grotesquely. Kilbourne let go and glanced at the sheet of paper on the desk, covered with equations. His practiced eye comprehended them in a quick survey; they were, he saw, merely a preliminary restatement of Loder's 2451 Gravitonic Field theory, no more. There was no point in preserving the sheet; it contained nothing new, and

Kilbourne was not a sentimental man. Whatever Loder had planned to add was frozen forever in the dead man's brain.

"I think he's dead," said a quiet voice.

Kilbourne looked up and scowled. "Yes, he's dead." For a moment he was tempted to add, "*—and you're still alive*, Leswick. There's no justice in the universe," but rejected the idea. This was no time for re-crimination.

"Most of the others are dead too," the thin man in the doorway said. "I just looked in all the cabins. It's a great tragedy, isn't it?"

"Yes," Kilbourne said tightly. "Get out of my way now—I want to check on the drug cargo."

HE shouldered his way past and out into the companionway, feeling hollow and angry inside. For Loder to die, and Anthony Leswick to survive—

Leswick had been his pet bugaboo on the voyage up to now. He was a Metaphysical Synthesist, flaunting an impressive but meaningless de-

gree from some Terran university. Kilbourne had only a vague idea of what Metaphysical Synthesis was—a school of philosophy attempting to unify anthropology, history, psychology, sociology, and half a dozen other inexact sciences into one confused totality, he decided—but he had little love for speculative philosophy in any case. *It has no rules*, his precise engineer's mind would protest. *Anything goes. It's too damned illogical!* He particularly detested Leswick's kind of "science," aiming at some foggy-eyed and useless synthesis of art, science, history, and other things to determine the basic forces of society. For Leswick, a mystic masquerading as a man of learning, to survive, and Loder to die—!

Swallowing his anger, Kilbourne made his way hand-over-hand down to the storage holds. The antivirotics were in Hold Six—one hundred ampoules, worth as many hundred thousand dollars, and each needing a year of hard laboratory work to replace. The drugs were experimental steps toward elimination of the virus

diseases that plagued Terran colonists on some outer planets. The cargo was destined for the Orbiter labs for further analysis. If it didn't arrive—

Kilbourne reached the hold level at last and looked around. Number Six Hold was far down the corridor, near the damaged end of the ship. It was hard to see with all the smoke clogging things, and he knew he didn't have much time. He broke into a trot.

A massive figure appeared suddenly from the dimness ahead and came awkwardly toward Kilbourne. When the two men approached each other, the newcomer put one ponderous arm forward and held Kilbourne back.

"Where you think you goin', fella?"

"Get out of my way, will you?" Kilbourne said impatiently. "I'm in a hurry." The man was a deckhand, apeline in body and in mind—a big, slow-moving, slow-thinking animal of a man who probably performed the most menial tasks in the engine-room. It would be in keeping with the general pattern of things, Kil-

bourne thought bitterly, if this ape were the only survivor of the engine crew.

The man continued to hold him with a lackadaisical hand against his chest. "I told you I'm in a hurry," Kilbourne repeated. He grabbed the thick wrist with both hands and wrenched it away, and started to move fast.

"You ain't in any hurry, Mac," was the rumbling reply. "You can't go but twenty feet more thisaway. I just come from there myself."

"What do you mean?"

The deckhand shrugged. "The red wall's down thisaway. You can't get past that no-how."

The red wall? That was about the topper, Kilbourne thought. The chocolate frosting on the cake. The cybernetic governor had lowered the radiation-shields, blocking the fore part of the ship from the aft. It meant that anything on the other side of the wall—including the drug cargo—was hopelessly hot from a bath of hard radiation. He turned away, shoulders slumping. The accident had worked out devilishly well, and his rescue mis-

sion was a total failure.

The deckhand grinned cheerfully. "You look all bushed, Mac. Hey, smile! *You* ain't dead, are you?"

Kilbourne shook his head angrily. "I might as well be," he said. "Might as well."

"Hey! What kinda talk is that?" The big man pummelled Kilbourne jovially. "Come on, Mac—let's you and me go find a lifeship and clear outa here. I got a feeling the whole place is goin' to blow."

"Yeah. Let's go find a lifeship," Kilbourne agreed. "There's a guy on the passenger level still alive. We might as well go get him too. We might as well."

CHAPTER II

THE lifeship was hardly more than a bubble of metal, holding three men comfortably, four uncomfortably. A ship the size of the *Clyde Bohmer* carried ten such boats, the theory being that ten small ships would be more likely to survive an accident to the mother ship than two or three larger ones. Under ultradrive,

the extra mass didn't matter much.

In this case, theory was right. The blowup knocked out three of the lifeships—but there were seven left. On their way back to find Leswick, Kilbourne and the deckhand came across two other passengers still alive, but in bad shape. Cold-bloodedly, Kilbourne decided to leave them. Even if he could get them into one of the lifeships, they'd probably not survive the trip to the planet below—and if they made it there alive, the wait for rescue would finish them.

"Go on, get in," Kilbourne said harshly to the feathery-looking man in front of him. "And without the book."

Anthony Leswick turned in appeal. "But—I need this book, Kilbourne. How else will I pass my time before rescue? Here—look at it!"

Kilbourne took the book, glanced at the title. *An application of Matrix Field Theory to the Cultural Units of Eastern New Guinea*. For a moment, tempted by the thought that the book might in some way deal with math or phy-

sics, he held on to it. Then, realizing that whatever matrix field theory there might be in the volume was probably contorted to fit current Metaphysical Synthesist jargon, he tossed it aside.

"Sorry," he said. "I'll have enough trouble navigating this boat without extra mass."

Leswick shook his head sadly, swung open the airlock hatch, and stepped in. From somewhere deep in the ship came the rumblings of an approaching explosion, and the computer's audio offered a confusing burst of helpful suggestions, concluding with the flat statement, "*Safest procedure is to abandon ship.*"

The deckhand climbed in after Leswick, and Kilbourne followed him, yanking down the cord that sealed the lock. He strapped himself down on the pneumochair before the control panels, while the other two men climbed into waiting acceleration cradles just behind him.

Kilbourne suddenly began to sweat. He had hoped to be piloting David Loder and a cargo of precious drugs; that was down the drain, and in-

stead he was saving a more-or-less worthless metaphysician, a clod of a deckhand, and himself. The other two certainly weren't as important as Loder and the drugs, and Kilbourne had never evaluated his own importance to the universe as particularly high.

But now it was no longer a matter of utility and importance. Emphasis had shifted, and it was now a much more elemental matter. Three lives—including his own—lay in his hands. And he had never piloted any sort of spaceship before.

Driblets of sweat poured down from his scalp, pasting together the stubby spikes of his close-cropped hair.

"We'd better take off," Leswick said nervously. "The ship may blow any second. Is there any problem?"

"None at all," Kilbourne forced himself to say. "I've got the thing well under control."

And to his surprise he realized it was so. Channels of his mind that he had thought long closed by rust suddenly opened brightly. He had never

piloted a ship, true enough—but he had basic knowledge, a grasp of theory. He knew how a spaceship worked and why, and he had more than enough math to compute a sort of an orbit. Maybe it wouldn't be a slick, professional job, but it would get them there. The thing *was* well under control.

With icy-calm fingers, he reached up and gripped the lever that would expel the life-ship from the mother vessel.

HE took a fix on the planet and began bringing the lifeship in on manual, feeling like a figure out of the earliest days of space travel, riding one in on her ear. The orbit he had concocted was a patchwork thing, blurred and smeared from repeated erasures, but he knew it was sound and would get them down. They'd land with a bang, perhaps, but they'd land. No one had any right to expect finesse on the first try.

Leswick and Tarzan—that was Kilbourne's new nickname for the deckhand, King of the Apes—had watched silently, craning to see over Kilbourne's

shoulders, as he had put together the rule-of-thumb orbit. The deckhand had stared with blunt uncomprehension, obviously fascinated by the doodling motions Kilbourne's pencil made in its rapid flight over the chart paper. As for Leswick, the metaphysician had kept silent out of deference to Kilbourne's apparent skill in a field in which he himself was totally ignorant, but he was watching with interest.

When Kilbourne was finished, he turned to the controls and set to work; guiding the lifeship in. He swung the small vessel in an ever-narrowing helix around the planet below, moving closer and closer until he could graze it tangentially and bring it to a landing.

The planet was one of a system of three, revolving around a minor unnamed G-type star. According to the charts it was an Earth-type world, habitable and inhabited. It had never been explored, though a survey team had come through the area some fifty years earlier and planted a rescue beacon on it without stopping to explore.

Kilbourne was gambling that

the beacon was still there and in working order. The coordinated colonial forces were embarked on a vast program which would eventually see the planting of rescue beacons on every planet in the galaxy for the benefit of shipwrecked travellers; right now, they were about a tenth of the way through the job, after more than a century.

The beacon would be emitting the standard signal modulating a 30-megacycle carrier, and once they had landed it would be readily possible for Kilbourne to rig a detector by cannibalizing some of the lifeship's works. The problem now was to land the ship—and that wasn't necessarily so easy.

Kilbourne glanced back at the men in the acceleration cradles. Tarzan was rocking placidly from side to side, probably deriving some sort of sensuous thrill from the motion. Leswick was more nervously alert, peering at the control-board with beady eyes.

Kilbourne smiled tensely. Their lives were in his hands. They were completely unequipped for saving them-

selves. What did they know of orbits and thrust, of jet compensation and mass ratios? *Nothing*. They were utterly dependent on whatever book-learning Kilbourne had accumulated, in combination with the applications his mind could devise to make use of it logically. Leswick and the big deckhand were just dead weight on this trip, Kilbourne thought. Just dead weight.

WHEN they were thirty minutes out from the *Clyde Bohmer*, the air in the cabin grew suddenly warm, and Kilbourne heard the conditioners straining frantically to hold the temperature down. Impelled by a sudden thought, he flicked on the rear viewscreen.

The crude screen lit and wavered crazily for a moment, then focussed. Against the blackness of space there was a sprinkling of tiny bright stars, and in the foreground a blazing new star that was listed in no Ephemeris.

It was the *Clyde Bohmer*.

"Take a look at the ship," Kilbourne said. He pointed to the screen.

"Where?"

"It's the star right in front," Kilbourne said. "It makes a lovely little nova, doesn't it?"

"God! What happened to the men aboard it?" Leswick asked.

"It musta been bad," the deckhand said slowly. "The whole thing blew up."

Kilbourne nodded. "That's about the size of it, chum. That's what these lifeships are for."

"How much longer before we reach that planet?" Leswick asked.

"We're halfway there," said Kilbourne, glancing at the figures in the margin of his chart. "We don't have anything much to worry about ourselves, now that we're clear of the ship."

He returned his attention to the job of navigating. The planet below grew nearer and nearer, and the cold tension in Kilbourne's stomach was replaced with a sort of quiet joy as he realized that his savvy and his logic were going to get them there.

Who said piloting spaceships is tough? There's nothing to it. Nothing at all.

The planet was close enough

now so he could see the irregular rounded shape of the continent on which the rescue beacon was planted. The chart gave him the location down to fractions of a second of arc, but that didn't do him much good; he couldn't navigate to such fine specifications. He fed the rest of his orbit into the automatic pilot, hoping they'd land reasonably close to the beacon, and unstrapped himself.

"What's the matter?" Leswick asked.

"We're about to arrive," said Kilbourne. "It may be a noisy landing. I want to be in one of those cradles when it happens."

CHAPTER III

THE three of them stood together unharmed outside the wreckage of the lifeship, and Kilbourne felt a certain satisfaction at having gotten them there safely.

It *had* been a noisy landing. The lifeship had ploughed into soft loam, smashing up its landing fins and otherwise demolishing itself, without much damage to its passengers ex-

cept for some incidental jolting.

"It smells pretty good," the deckhand said. He stood leaning against the ship's hull, his legs planted firmly in the yielding soil, head thrown back. "Smells just like air—real air. Good place."

Leswick frowned uneasily. "Isn't it dangerous, breathing the air of an unknown world without making some tests?"

Kilbourne grinned. "We *are* making a test. We're breathing the air, and it isn't killing us. Risky, but it happens to be the only test we're equipped to make. Besides, the chart says the place has breathable air, which means it's mostly nitrogen and oxygen and no poisonous things like methane thrown in. And besides that, what metaphysical suggestion would you have for going elsewhere if the damned stuff *weren't* breathable? The lifeship isn't ever going to move again, you know."

It was all a matter of logic—and the metaphysician, curse him, just didn't like to think logically, which made him a worse handicap right now than the deckhand. The deck-

hand didn't like to think at all—but, unlike Leswick, he had a certain amount of brute strength that would no doubt be useful in the long trek to the beacon.

Kilbourne surveyed his team. Leswick was a small, thin man with graying hair and deep-set, apologetic-looking eyes. His blunt stubby fingers indicated a miserable mechanical aptitude, and there was something about the wavering line of his mouth that seemed to explain why his intellectual interests had not been caught by the rational sciences.

As for Tarzan—Bill Dombey was his real name—he was simply a good-natured animal, topping Kilbourne's solid five-eleven by nearly six inches. He moved with a gait that was at once shambling and felinely graceful; his face was broad and open, with thick, honest features. Dombey wore the traditional garb of his trade: a black turtleneck sweater, overalls, and a heavy growth of three-day stubble.

"Okay," Kilbourne said. "I'm going to build a detector out of some of the leftover

radar parts from the lifeship. We won't be needing the ship any more, and we will need the detector. After that we're going to find out where the rescue beacon is, and we're going to go there. Got that?"

"What are we going to eat?" Leswick asked. "It may take days to reach the beacon."

"Quite possibly. We'll test the food the same way we tested the air—by trying it. I'll be able to build a small water-purifier" — *thank the Lord for a technical education*, Kilbourne thought—"but we'll have to feel our way with the meat and the vegetables. There's not too much danger from strange bacteria, by the way. They'll probably run just as fast from us as we would from them." He folded his arms. "Both of you understand? I think it goes without saying that I'll assume leadership of this little expedition on the basis of my technical abilities."

"Very well," Leswick said. "I'll take your orders."

Dombey remained silent. "What about you, Tarzan?"

"I don't care," the big man

grunted. "I'm gettin' pretty hungry. We goin' to be doin' much more talkin'?"

AN hour later, Kilbourne crouched scowling over a tangled mass of wires and coils, while Leswick stood above him with a mild expression of curiosity on his face and Dombey munched a translucent green fruit he had found somewhere.

Kilbourne was tinkering frantically with the equipment, trying to turn a radar set into a peak-detector in the quickest possible time. He was cursing whatever manufacturer of electronics equipment on whatever backwater world had turned out the lifeships; they had used an old-fashioned "can-of-worms"-type circuitry instead of the simple, interchangeable modular units of steatite that were common through most of the galaxy, making Kilbourne's job about ten times as hard as it ought to be.

"What's the trouble?" Leswick asked.

"You won't understand if I tell you," Kilbourne snapped. The sun was hot, and the open clearing created by the

abrupt arrival of the ship gave no shade. He added an additional capacitor and slid the copper-shielded case closed with a twitch of his pliers. "That might do it," he said, and stood back.

Leswick peered mystifiedly at the confused-looking network of resistors, condensers, and crystal diodes, then turned away. "How can you tell one thing from another?"

"Sweat and toil, friend. Two words you probably haven't synthesized into your philosophy yet." Kilbourne picked the realigned equipment up gingerly and carried it back inside the ship. Carefully, he wired it to the power source, and a few tentative hums came forth.

So far, so good, he thought grimly. Just call me—Robinson Caruso, was that his name? The fellow who lived on the island.

Fifteen minutes later he emerged from the ship, dripping with perspiration and carrying a much-bescribbled sheet of paper. Dombey now squatted over an enormous heap of the green fruits, and was devouring them with obvious joy,

while Leswick was leaning against the scaly gray side of an uprooted tree. The metaphysician seemed deep in thought.

"I've found the beacon," Kilbourne announced loudly. "It's—" he glanced at the crude map he had drawn—"located about four hundred kilometers east of here. That's the best approximation I could get."

"Four hundred kilometers! But that's—"

"I know, Professor. It's going to take us more than one afternoon to get there. And so far as I know it's all jungle between here and there. Tarzan, throw me one of those fruits, will you?"

"Here, boss." Dombey palmed one of the fruits and tossed it to Kilbourne, who snagged it, examined it perfunctorily, and took a hesitant bite.

It was watery and tasteless, like a half-ripened avocado, but it seemed to be harmless enough, and nutritious. Kilbourne finished it in four more bites and spat out the core, a small hard red seed. "Not

bad," he commented. "Professor, suppose you get off your backside and gather as many of these as you can find; they may be strictly localized, and we're going to need every safe kind of food we can find. Tarzan, you come here with me. I want to drag anything we can possibly use and carry out of the ship before nightfall."

He turned away and headed into the ship, followed by Dombey. Leswick, he saw, had begun to gather the fruits as directed. Good, Kilbourne thought. If the metaphysician would cooperate, they could probably make it through the jungle to the beacon without much difficulty.

He wondered if Dombey and Leswick would ever realize what a stroke of luck it was for them to have escaped with a trained engineer. Dombey, of course, never would; the poor dimwit was happy to be alive, but that was as far as it went.

Leswick, though—the professor of Metaphysical Synthesis, equipped only to map cultural arcs and tribal war-patterns and draw high-sounding conclusions from them. Kil-

bourne realized that his own attitude was rapidly becoming one of smugness, and in self-annoyance he tried to change his train of thought. He had no right being smug merely because his mechanical aptitudes had led him to study what subsequent events were proving a curriculum of survival.

"Come on, Tarzan. Help me get all the spare tin outside."

"Sure, boss. Sure." Dombey grinned, ran a finger through the heavy stubble on his cheek, and spat out a mouthful of food. He rubbed his stomach contentedly and belched. "You know somethin', boss—them fruits is pretty good, but I could go for a little beef now. Something to drink, maybe, too."

"You know something, Tarzan? So could I!"

UNEASINESS returned with nightfall. Kilbourne and his two fellow-castaways spent the night in the ship, while a guardian fire flickered outside. Kilbourne passed most of the night lying awake.

They wouldn't have the ship to protect them after this night

—and, unless he could figure out some way of constructing tents out of salvaged radiation shielding, which didn't seem likely, they were going to be sleeping in the open from now until the time they reached the beacon—and afterward, until the rescue ship showed.

Kilbourne didn't like that. Not on a strange planet, the only information known about it the curt notation on the galactic charts, "Inhabited."

Inhabited? By what? Would they be able to deal with them? The lifeship's survival kit included a converter for communicating with intelligent aliens, but that didn't guarantee a peaceful reception.

And strange noises sounded in the jungle distance—the chittering of alien birds, the dull visceral rumbling of ponderous land-creatures, the thin neighing of roaming ungulates. Kilbourne listened worriedly, wondering what would happen later, when they were camped deeper in the forest. Right now, the animals stayed away; the fire in front of the ship was probably enough to make them keep their distance, and

aside from that the trees were burned and flattened for a few hundred yards around the landing-point. They kept away—now.

Kilbourne tossed uneasily, wondering how he was going to cope with the myriad problems of the forest alone. Dombey was a question-mark, and Leswick, soft bookish city-dweller that he was, would be no help at all. Kilbourne realized gloomily that the journey to the beacon would leave even him at a loss; the best technical education in the world would be no help when he was facing a springing tiger. The journey that would begin in the morning would be even more trying, if possible, than the voyage in the lifeship.

CHAPTER IV

IN the morning, the sun was blistering hot in the clearing. Kilbourne took two hours to assemble everything he was planning to take.

He had worked up a crude water-purifier, using pliers and savvy, and had sketched a vague map of the area they were about to cover, basing

his guesses on the data brought in by the detector. The acceleration-cradles had been ripped down and converted into sleeping-ponchos. Under Kilbourne's direction, Dombey had hammered a few pots and pans out of stripped-away shielding. With these things, plus the contents of the lifeship's pitifully inadequate survival kit, Kilbourne felt they stood a good chance of making it through the jungle to the beacon.

Unless, he thought cheerlessly, they ran into a situation that required weapons—wild animals, or, worse, dangerous aliens. Of firearms they had none, and Kilbourne had been unable to improvise any efficient substitutes. Dombey carried a small jackknife that would be useful for skinning animals but not much help otherwise; Leswick had suggested carving boomerangs, but Kilbourne had rejected the idea on the grounds that making them would take too long, and that the instruments would be of doubtful efficiency in the hands of unskilled users.

We'll get there, though. Kil-

bourne told himself that over and over again. There was a well-defined path leading eastward, possibly as far as the beacon; they would take that path and stick to it, meeting each danger as they came to it. It was the only way.

He looked around. The denuded lifeship was already the home of three or four bizarre bird-like things. Dombey stood placidly guarding the heap of possessions on the ground, and Leswick, once again, was lost in meditation.

"O k a y," Kilbourne said. "It's getting toward noon, and I think we've done all we can here. Let's load up and get going."

He strapped as much as he could to Dombey's broad, uncomplaining back. The giant gave a few experimental grunts.

"That too much for you?"

"Can manage," Dombey said, and staggered around a little to prove it.

"Your turn," Kilbourne said to Leswick. The metaphysician presented his back with surprising willingness, and Kilbourne strapped on the bundled-up ponchos. He hoisted

what remained to his own back, and Leswick lashed it to.

"Onward and upward," Kilbourne said. He glanced at his compass for reassurance and began to walk eastward—toward the rescue beacon. Leswick fell in behind him, and Dombey brought up the rear.

They marched silently for nearly an hour. The path wound twistingly through the jungle, but Kilbourne, frequently referring to his compass, was gratified to find that their progression was predominantly easterly. The path was well worn, lined with stamped-down leaves and twigs, as if it were traversed often. Kilbourne wondered how long it would be before they encountered the people who had made the paths.

It was a semi-tropical jungle, heavy with fog and warm mist. Humming yellow-winged insects circled the three men's heads, and they marched forward through clouds of red gnats. The path was bordered with tall, narrow-boled, scaly-barked trees whose succulent compound leaves swung low into their faces. Behind them

was ranged a seemingly endless stand of the twisted shrubs that bore the edible green fruits. It was Leswick who pointed this out.

"I should have known it," the metaphysician said testily. "Those fruits are everywhere—and here am I, carrying ten pounds of them on my back!"

"Keep them there," Kilbourne said. "There's no reason to assume they grow everywhere—and we may be sorry later if we throw them away now."

"They grow everywhere," Dombey interjected suddenly, in unusually positive tones. "He *can* throw them away."

Kilbourne chuckled. "Oh? Have you made a study of floral dispersion here, Tarzan? Are you *positive* the fruits grow everywhere?"

Dombey grunted in annoyance and said, "Boss, he can throw those things away. He's only gonna get tired from carrying 'em, and there's plenty more."

"You hear that, Kilbourne?"

"Look here, Leswick—I'm sure Dombey means well, but until I'm convinced those

shrubs are common all over I don't intend to scrap our supply. Ten pounds more or less won't kill you."

"He's not a very strong man," Dombey persisted. "He don't need to carry them."

This time Kilbourne became angry. He whirled in his tracks and said, "That's enough from you, Dombey! When I need your suggestions I'll come asking for them!"

The big man shrugged, but said nothing. Kilbourne turned front again, and stepped up his pace. Up to now, Dombey had maintained a discreet silence, as befitted his conversational abilities. But if the big deckhand were going to start making trouble now—

Kilbourne scowled. If this kept on, the three of them would be at each other's throats inside half an hour. And it was going to take days to reach the beacon.

THE journey proceeded without further incident until half-past one, when Kilbourne announced it was time for lunch. To his surprise, he found Dombey shaking his head slowly.

"No. Don't stop now," the deckhand rumbled.

"What? Aren't you hungry?"

Dombey nodded.

"Then why shouldn't we stop now?" Kilbourne demanded, annoyed.

An expression close to pain passed over Dombey's thick features. His nostrils flickered momentarily as he sniffed the air. Then he shook his head again. "Bad to stop now. Don't like it here."

Kilbourne folded his arms and glanced around the little clearing. A sparkling stream wound down from a low hill not far away, and globular fruits hanging from a furry-branched tree gave promise of a delicious meal. And yet Dombey didn't want to stop for lunch.

He glanced at Leswick, whose face registered complete lack of concern. "You hungry, professor?"

Leswick nodded. "But if Dombey doesn't want to stop—"

"Let's go, boss," Dombey said uneasily, shifting his weight from one ponderous

foot to the other. "I don't want to stay here. Smells bad."

Keep your temper, Kilbourne thought. He forced a grin and said, "All right, Tarzan. We'll keep hiking until you get your appetite functioning. How's that?"

"Don't like it here," Dombey repeated dimly.

They moved on. After they had passed some thirty feet into the underbrush, Kilbourne turned and peered back at the clearing. He gasped and nudged Leswick, who also turned.

A gazelle-like creature about the height of a man had come down from the little hill and, standing on the hindmost of its three pairs of legs, was stretching upward like a neckless giraffe to nibble some of the fruits from the tree in the clearing.

Kilbourne watched in horror as an arm slithered silently out of the innocent-looking brook—a rubbery green arm, tipped with suckers and two bright, sharp claws. Seemingly infinitely extensible, it moved rapidly across the ground toward the unwary gazelle, which was still engaged in the difficult task of

knocking a fruit from the lowest branch.

In desperation, the gazelle gathered its six legs for a little leap that would enable it to reach the dangling fruit—and in that moment, the arm from the water reached it and snapped around all six hooves. The gazelle uttered a soft, frightened bleat as the arm began to retract.

It slid across the ground toward the brook, dragging the unfortunate gazelle with it. With a motion like the cracking of a whip, it yanked the animal the last few feet roughly, hoisted it over a rock at the brook's edge, and pulled it down out of sight into the water. Suddenly, the forest was very silent.

Kilbourne moistened his dry lips, but said nothing.

"It's a good thing we didn't stop to eat lunch in that clearing," Leswick said hoarsely.

Kilbourne nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah." He turned away, inwardly shaken, after a glance at the unanimated face of Dombey.

How did he know? Kilbourne asked himself furious-

ly. *How could he possibly know?*

THERE WAS only one answer, Kilbourne decided, as they moved further along. Idiot's luck—a foolish hunch, nothing more. There was no rational explanation for what had just happened, and no need to look for one. It was a wild coincidence, and to compute it as valid data would be a statistical mistake.

So when they reached another clearing and Kilbourne announced they would eat here, he was prepared to overrule any objection.

"Don't want to eat here," Dombey said like a stubborn child.

"I say we do," Kilbourne responded immediately, and unpacked the knapsack. Dombey remained standing.

"Do we have to eat here, boss?"

"Yes," Kilbourne said. "Even if you don't want to."

Dombey shrugged and sat down, looking unhappy. Throughout the meal, Kilbourne found himself glancing off toward the forest whenever

he saw a frond waver in the breeze. He was nervous; the image of that slimy green arm stretching up from the little brook still shook him.

But he had to demonstrate that they couldn't operate on hunches, that that was the wrong way. At mealtime, you ate—and weren't swayed by



coincidences of any kind.

Sure enough, nothing untoward happened during the meal. They ate reasonably heartily, packed, and resumed march. Kilbourne felt a distinct sense of relief.

But no more than a hundred yards more had been covered Dombey said abruptly, "We get off the path here."

"What?"

Dombey gestured with a calloused thumb. "We gotta get off the path here."

"Are you going to make trouble every step of the way?" Kilbourne asked, putting acid into his tone even though he knew it would be wasted on the deckhand. "This is the third time you've stopped us, Dombey. We're never going to get there if—"

A look of sheer agony clouded Dombey's inarticulate face. "Say, boss, we *gotta* get off the path!"

It was a matter of principle, Kilbourne realized. His leadership of the group was at stake. He looked at Leswick to find out where the metaphysician stood, but Leswick's face was totally noncommittal.

"We *aren't* getting off," Kilbourne said positively. "And I'll give the orders in this party, Dombey. Remember that. I'll give the orders."

A new expression entered Dombey's eyes—one that Kilbourne had never seen there before. The amiability had left the big man's face. "You ain't giving the orders no more," Dombey said. "We gets off this path." He moved toward Kilbourne, agile as a big cat despite the heavy load of gear strapped to his back.

"Get away, Dombey!" Kilbourne ordered, but the big man kept approaching. Kilbourne threw up an arm defensively just as Dombey brought his arm around. The punch caught Kilbourne in forearm and numbed it.

"Leswick! Pull him back! Get him away from me!"

The metaphysician, however, only moved further away from the two—and Dombey closed in.

A punch jarred Kilbourne's stomach. He tried to defend himself, but it was like fighting off a hurricane. Dombey grazed Kilbourne's jaw with

an open-handed blow that left him spinning dizzily, and followed with a head-rattling swipe to the right shoulder.

He's gone berserk, Kilbourne thought with curious clarity in the midst of the beating. But there was a strange intensity in Dombey's eyes—and to Kilbourne's amazement, it struck him as a totally sane expression.

He backed away, but Dombey grabbed him with one hand. He managed to land a feeble blow above the deckhands heart, and then Dombey slapped him, just once, on the side of the face. Kilbourne's head wobbled and his knees went out from under him. He felt a swinging sensation as Dombey hoisted him in the air and dumped him over his broad shoulder, and then he blanked out completely.

KILBOURNE woke, feeling as if he had been steam-rollered. He stood up uneasily and glared at the two men. Leswick looked away guiltily; Dombey gazed placidly, without a hint of his former rage visible. But it was clear to Kil-

bourne that he was no longer in charge.

They had paused by the side of a stream, and had bathed Kilbourne's face until he returned to consciousness.

"Where are we?"

"About a hundred yards off the path," Leswick said.

"I feel like I've been out for days," said Kilbourne.

"About five minutes," the metaphysician told him. "You might want to take a look back through the underbrush. It's very interesting out there on the path."

Kilbourne turned and squinted through the tangle of vegetation in the direction in which Leswick pointed. As he looked, he felt his skin grow cold.

"Pretty, aren't they?" Leswick asked.

They were quadrupeds, lean and low-slung, moving in what seemed an infinite procession along the path. There must have been a hundred of the vicious-looking things on parade, each grasping the tail of the one before, elephant-fashion, in his teeth.

The teeth: knife-blades,

more appropriately. Each beast had four visible incisors, needle-pointed, and at the sides of their mouths projected shovel-shaped yellow-green tusks that probably came to a razor's-edge sharpness. The beasts were dirty white in color, with staring blue-rimmed eyes. Their fur was filthy, matted, stinking. Even at this distance, Kilbourne could sense their overpowering musky odor.

They were killers—silent, moving on padded feet, demonstrating their massed might. He shuddered at the thought of what might have happened had the three Earthmen been on the path when the parade came by.

Dombey's baby-faced expression reflected no pride of accomplishment. *Another wild hunch?* Could be, Kilbourne thought. Whatever the answer was, Dombey's hunches about the forest had saved them twice from death. It was like giving responsibility to a child, but Kilbourne realized the sane thing to do would be to relinquish command without protest to the deckhand, and

let Dombey lead them the rest of the way. It made good common sense; after their experiences, Leswick was sure to support Dombey anyway.

Besides, Kilbourne rationalized, it couldn't hurt. He still had the compass, and if Dombey got too far off course it would always be possible to club him down unawares and take over leadership again. Cold-blooded, perhaps, but Kilbourne felt no desire to spend the rest of his life wandering aimlessly about on this planet. For the time being, though, so long as Dombey proceeded toward the beacon, it didn't much matter who actually led the party, Kilbourne thought.

Dombey got to his feet and grunted, "Animals are gone. Back to the path now."

He led them in cautious single-file through the thicket and back to the main path. Kilbourne, now bringing up the rear, watched in open admiration the graceful way in which the deckhand maneuvered through the thick forest. The Tarzan nickname, Kilbourne realized suddenly, was

appropriate. *Dombey's in his native habitat now.*

They returned to the path, which still was heavy with the smell of the now-vanished quadrupeds. Kilbourne stared nervously after them, but there was no sign of the beasts. The path was clear again.

Two uneventful days and nights passed under Dombey's leadership. Kilbourne did little talking; he knew he had suffered an incalculable loss of prestige in Leswick's eyes through his demotion, and he contented himself with following along detachedly. Dombey was keeping on course, and that was all that mattered.

On the third day, they encountered intelligent native life for the first time.

CHAPTER V

THEY had emerged in a wide clearing, and a group of alien beings stood there, each one looking as much like the next as was conceivable. It wasn't the first-glance indistinguishability of any unfamiliar species, but an almost total identity of appearance.

The aliens were squat, barrel-shaped creatures with round, staring eyes, heavy kangaroo-like hind legs, and fuzzy six-fingered forepaws with quite definitely opposable thumbs. They wore beaded sashes around their waists, but there was no evidence of any external sexuality, primary or secondary. Each of them clutched a barbed sword in one hand, and they were murmuring excitedly to each other. Their voices were dull, buzz-saw drones.

Kilbourne saw Dombey drop back from the lead and stare blankly at him, Dombey, having brought them safely through the jungle, was abdicating now that they had reached civilization.

Quickly, Kilbourne turned and unstrapped some of the gear from Dombey's back. He burrowed through the packet of pots and pans and finally drew forth the slim length of the thought-converter.

"Say a few words, friends," he told the aliens. Give us some palaver, so we can analyze your language."

The aliens replied with a

series of buzzes and clicks, and Kilbourne made rapid adjustments on the Thorson converter as they spoke, sliding the guide up and down the indicator until he struck the proper linguistic type. In mid-buzz, the alien language came clear.

"Buzzbuz mumbleclick danger hostile-animal stranger-type surround with many swords if hostile *KILL*."

"We are not hostile," Kilbourne told them. He ransacked his brains for some way to demonstrate this, and came up with no useful suggestions. "We are from up there," he said, pointing toward the sky. "We have fallen. We want to go back to our homes."

"Hostile. Threat. Danger. *KILL*."

Kilbourne saw Dombey stirring dangerously, and hoped the deckhand would restrain himself until the situation was more stable. It would be certain slaughter if Dombey provoked them to make use of those shaggy-toothed swords.

The aliens were moving closer now. "We are heading east toward our friends," Kilbourne said desperately. "When we

find them, we will leave your world and never return. Do you understand? We're not hostile. We want to leave as soon as we find our friends. We want to leave."

The buzzing continued ominously, and the converter rendered it as: "We are not capable of deciding. We refer to higher authority who decides. Make no more words, but come with us to village-place."

"Very well," Kilbourne said. "Take us there."

He shut off the converter as the swarm of aliens converged on them, forming a tight, buzzing circle. Turning to Dombey he said, "Do everything they tell us to do, without complaining, or they'll kill us. *KILL*. You understand, Dombey?"

The deckhand nodded slowly. "I don't like them," he rumbled. "They're no good."

"I don't like them much either, but there are too many of them to fight. They can kill us, Dombey. Go where they tell you."

"Okay," Dombey said agreeably. "I'll go."

Kilbourne looked at Les-

wick. The metaphysician had said nothing the past five minutes, and was permitting himself to be shoved along uncomplainingly. Leswick's mild eyes were heavy with thought.

"What's the matter with you, Professor?" Kilbourne asked harshly. "You synthesizing some new cultural phenomena?"

"Quiet, Kilbourne," the metaphysician said with unusual force. "Let me think this out, will you?"

"Sorry!" Kilbourne said, in mock humility. "Exceedingly sorry!"

THE VILLAGE of the aliens began to draw near, and Kilbourne's brows were pulled tight in painful concentration. There *had* to be some way out of this. There had to be some way he could prove peaceful intentions to these untrusting aliens and secure permission to move on toward the beacon. He wondered if a possible tack might be to allow the aliens to imprison them, and then break out during the night. It was simpler than trying to fathom the complexities

of an alien way of thinking. *Dammit, there ought to be some logical solution!* But none presented itself as they entered the village.

The scene before them was an almost terrifyingly industrious one. Hundreds more of the barrel-shaped aliens bustled around with awesome haste, preforming many tasks. Here, four of them were pounding grain; there, eight were erecting a new hut.

The village consisted of row on row of these identical huts, each about six feet high and five wide—big enough, that is, to hold just one alien. The round creatures built in a roughly rectangular pattern—not so rough, Kilbourne corrected, as he saw the precise way in which the rows of huts were aligned.

In the center of the rectangle was an enormous hut, of the same design but perhaps twenty feet high and about as wide, towering over the others like a domed skyscraper. *The higher authority*, Kilbourne thought. The big building was obviously a temple, or palace, or city hall, where the tribal

rulers lived. Concluding from this that the interview which would decide their fate was near, Kilbourne snapped the thought-converter on again.

"You will go there," the aliens told him. "We will take your case to the high one."

Kilbourne nodded abstractedly and glanced around. No children were evident in the village—merely hosts of identical-looking aliens, all of the same height and general appearance. To his surprise, he saw a few loafers also, as the procession toward the temple continued. These aliens lay stretched on the ground in attitudes of utter laziness. Their skin-coloring was a slightly deeper brown, and their bodies were flabby and obese. The sight of these apparently privileged few struck Kilbourne as odd, in view of the frantic industry of the rest of the aliens.

Finally they reached the large building. Kilbourne turned to the nearest of his captors.

"Do we go in now?"

"Negative negative negative. Strange ones must not enter.

Stay here while we convey information."

Kilbourne shrugged. "I guess we can wait," he said to Leswick. Dombey, vacant-eyed, stood by idly.

Time passed—one minute, three, five. Kilbourne fidgeted uneasily. He had defied the odds by getting the life-ship free of the doomed ship and safely to the planet despite lack of practical astronautical experience; somehow, they had gotten safely through the jungle as well. But now he was stumped. Their lives were the toys of these aliens, and he had no ready way out. Unarmed, outnumbered, they were totally at the mercy of these creatures.

After another five minutes, the three aliens who had entered the temple returned, and buzzed something to the ring that guarded the Earthmen. The converter failed to pick up the statement, but a moment later one of the aliens turned to Kilbourne.

"You threaten our safety."

"No!" Kilbourne protested. "We'll leave as soon as we

reach our—our friend, to the east!”

“The Mother says you threaten our safety,” the alien said stolidly. “Therefore you must die.”

Swords lifted. Then, before anyone could move, before Kilbourne had even begun to evaluate that last statement, Leswick came to life.

“I demand to see the Mother!” he said loudly. “I claim the right to return to our hive!”

KILBOURNE did a double-take, blinking stupidly for an instant, then reacting. He looked at Leswick, who stood in sudden animation, weak eyes bright, hands quivering in nervous anticipation.

“What did you say?”

“Hush,” Leswick muttered. The aliens were strangely silent, turning to face each other, buzzing and humming beneath the converter’s range of audibility. Kilbourne realized in that moment what the world of Bill Dombey must be like, for now he shared the deckhand’s blank stupefaction. He heard Leswick’s tense, nerv-

ous breathing as the aliens continued to confer.

Finally one of them said, “We will talk to the Mother again. We will see if she will admit you.”

The alien re-entered the domed building, returning after some two or three minutes. When the creature spoke, the unemotional buzz seemed to have an undertone of surprise in it.

“You may enter,” the alien said. “The Mother will see you.”

Kilbourne moved forward instinctively, but Leswick put a hand on his arm.

“No—I’ll go in alone. You stay out here and keep Dombey company.” Leswick took the converter from him.

“But — ” Kilbourne shrugged, realizing he was out of his depth, and let the metaphysician enter. The ring of guards closed tightly around Dombey and Kilbourne after Leswick disappeared.

Again time passed. Kilbourne watched the seconds drag interminably until the moment he finally heard Les-

wick's voice call from within the building.

"Kilbourne, will you come in here now? Better bring Dombey, too."

"Coming," Kilbourne said. He nudged the deckhand. "Let's go in, Tarzan—and remember, stand still and keep your hands to yourself."

Dombey grinned appealingly. "Sure, boss."

They went in. Leswick was standing in near-darkness, looking upward. Kilbourne paused, while his eyes adjusted themselves to the change in lighting.

"This is the Mother of this tribe, Kilbourne."

"Welcome, strange one."

The engineer looked upward in the direction of the voice, and saw the Mother. She sat in the darkest recess of the tomb-like building, staring down. The Mother was a strange sight.

She—s o m e h o w, the sex seemed apparent—was vast and bloated, nearly twice the height of the other aliens and grotesquely distended. Kilbourne gasped. He had been on alien worlds and seen alien life

before, but there was something weird and frightening about the Mother.

"Tell the Mother about *our* Mother," Leswick urged him, in a dry, staccato voice. "Go ahead, Kilbourne. Tell—her—about—our—Mother. Describe our Mother's all-enfolding thirty-megacycle carrier beam."

Kilbourne felt as if he were treading water for an instant, and then he caught on. Taking the hint, he said, "Our Mother stands to the east, several days journey. She is taller than we are, and does not move from where she stands. Set in her forehead is an eye of great beauty." He went on to describe the signal beacon in as careful detail as he could, while underneath the description his mind protested against the sheer insanity of what was taking place.

Finally he ran out of details, and the huge alien said, "Yes, we know the place and we have seen your Mother. We know her and we have long wondered where her children might be."

"We long to return to her,"

Leswick said anxiously. "We did not mean to enter your hive, but it became necessary in the course of our journey toward the Mother."

"We understand," came the solemn reply.

"Then you will help us?"

"Yes," the Mother said. "Yes, we will cause our people to guide you to your Mother. We know and take pity upon you, strange ones."

Leswick knelt, and Kilbourne felt impelled to do the same. Only Dombey remained standing—and then even he, in superstitious awe, lowered himself ponderously to his knees.

"We thank you," Leswick said with deep gravity.

"Yes, we thank you," Kilbourne added.

Uncomprehendingly, Dombey echoed their thanks with a deep-voiced "Thanks" of his own.

CHAPTER VI

MUCH later Kilbourne began to understand.

They had left the village the following morning, after being

fed lavishly on a jelly-like food with a pungent, likable taste. Twelve of the aliens, swords bared, escorted them into the forest, and, deploying themselves six before and six behind, led the three wanderers further toward the east—toward the signal beacon, toward their Mother.

Kilbourne was ill at ease and depressed. The sight of the bloated alien creature in the temple disturbed him, for one, and the fact that Leswick had handled the situation with such complete success upset him as well.

It was not until they were well out of sight of the village, though, and moving at a fast easterly pace, that Kilbourne voiced the question that had burned in his mind since the strange interview.

"How did you know they were what they were, Leswick? And how did you know they would react this way?"

The metaphysician smiled mildly. "How did I *know*? That's a loaded word, Kilbourne. It means different things to you and to me. You, for instance, won't accept the

validity of intuitive judgment. So I can say I *knew* it would happen, but that's meaningless to you."

"And Dombey *knew* there would be carnivores parading down the path, I suppose," Kilbourne said sourly. "Which is why he beat the blazes out of me while you stood by grinning."

"It was the only way to get you to accept the evidence," Leswick said. "There wasn't time for further discussion—so Dombey had to use his fists. Similarly, I raised my voice when I thought I had the solution."

Kilbourne nodded. "We've been through this discussion before, Leswick."

"I know. And you still stick to empiricism. You'd be lying headless in the dirt right now if I shared that attitude."

They reached a fork in the road, and the aliens turned left. Kilbourne realized he'd again been scored against; how would he have known which way to turn, if the aliens hadn't come along to guide him to the beacon?

"So you guessed the aliens

were bee-analogues," Kilbourne said. "And it was damned clever of you to win the Queen Bee's sympathy by claiming the beacon was our mother and we were returning to the hive. But how could you *tell*?" Kilbourne demanded exasperated. "How did you know what to do?"

"You haven't studied Metaphysical Synthesis, have you?" Leswick asked suddenly.

"I know a little about it," Kilbourne said. "But—"

"You know enough about it not to like it, but not enough to understand it, obviously—or you'd know how I arrived at my conclusions."

"You got there through inductive reasoning," Kilbourne said. "That's all Metaphysical Synthesis is."

"That's part of it," Leswick admitted. "The base." He grinned. "But Dombey's something of a Metaphysical Synthesist too, even if he doesn't know it himself. Ask him what *his* techniques of logic are, some time."

THE beacon came into sight the next day. Kilbourne's

first indication of that came when the leading group of aliens dropped back and began to jabber excitedly with each other.

"Give me the converter," Leswick said.

Kilbourne switched the instrument on and handed it to the metaphysician. "There is our Mother," Leswick announced loudly. "We thank you for your help. You may not approach any closer."

The aliens nodded acquiescence. "We wish you well, strange ones," one of them said, and they backed away and began to move off down the path toward their village. Within five minutes, there was no sign of them.

"There was a time when I thought we wouldn't make it," Leswick said. "I wondered if Dombey and I were ever going to assert control over you long enough to keep you from fouling things up. You outlived your usefulness about the time we started through the jungle."

"What do you mean?" Kilbourne asked, although he now knew perfectly well what Leswick meant.

"I mean that logic can carry you only so far—logic and technical knowhow. The one thing you *didn't* know when the lifeship pushed off was when to stop limiting your actions to logical ones."

Kilbourne reddened. He had tried to run the whole journey as intelligently and logically as he could—and, somehow, to Dombey and Leswick he appeared an utter fool. And he wouldn't have made it through without both of them.

Sure, logical thinking was necessary and valuable—but it didn't take you the whole journey. Sheer animal instinct was needed in the jungle. Dombey had that—Dombey, who had practically no mind at all, had that survival ability in the jungle. And in dealing with an alien race, logic didn't work too well either. It was the kind of logic-plus that the metaphysician dealt in that had pulled them through.

For the first time in his life, Kilbourne felt his faith in his own competence and self adequacy falter. He wasn't at all sure he comprehended what Dombey and Leswick had

done, but he knew right well he couldn't do it himself. The knowledge hurt.

"How long are you going to stand there dreaming?" Leswick asked impatiently.

"There's the beacon, you know."

Kilbourne paused, tongue-tied and confused.

"We're waiting for you," Leswick said. "You don't think *I* know how to operate a *machine*, do you?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, Kilbourne stepped forward to the signal beacon. The beacon showed the signs of half a century's weathering, but otherwise it was in fine shape, and the pilot light glowed a pleasant red, indicating that it was in working order. He depressed the call-stud.

Almost instantly a voice said, "State name and location."

"Spacial Engineer Roy Kilbourne, of Earth. I'm on an unnamed planet in an unnamed system." He proceeded to give the coordinates of the world they had landed on.

When he was finished, the voice said, "Hey, you're from the *Clyde Bohmer*, aren't you?"

"That's right. I escaped in a lifeship."

"Your name's here on the casualty list. You're the first survivor to call in. You all alone?"

"No," Kilbourne said. "I'm with Anthony Leswick and William Dombey. As far as I know we're the only survivors."

The voice at the other end was silent for a moment. Then: "Leswick... Dombey. Yeah, they're on the list too. A metaphysical whatsit and a jetmonkey. Musta been some time of it, huh?"

"It wasn't bad," Kilbourne said.

"I mean—running a lifeship with all that dead weight with you. Lot of good those two musta been."

Kilbourne frowned, then smiled as he realized the other man would never understand. "Yeah," he said quietly. "All that dead weight."

THE END

ALTERNATE UNIVERSE

by ROBERT BLOCH

illustrated by ORBAN

The drug from the new mescaline derivative had opened a doorway to a parallel world existing in a dimension side by side with our own. But was it a better world?

STANLEY HUNTER strolled into the office wearing a pearl-gray homburg and matching gloves.

"Nice day for sex," he remarked.

Tom Morton merely grunted. He had heard his bachelor partner voice this sentiment before—in fact, he voiced it every day, rain or shine.

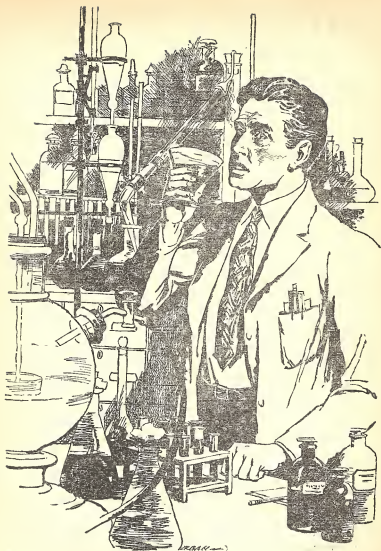
Fortunately for the business affairs of Bio Laboratories, Stanley Hunter confined himself to the sales-promotion end. Maybe his consuming interest in human biological affairs helped him to sell biological products to pharmacists.

Tom Morton didn't much care, as long as he was permitted to devote his own attention to research and experiment. He picked up a small vial from the desk and squinted at it.

"What have you got there?" asked Stanley Hunter. "Some new aphrodisiac, I hope?"

"Not exactly," Tom answered. "In fact I don't quite know what this is. Some off-trail derivative of mescaline hydrochloride. The boys from the lab just sent it in for testing."

"Mescaline?" Stanley Hunter sounded a little vague. "Isn't that the stuff junkies use when



they want to climb the walls?"

"Aldous Huxley isn't a junkie," Tom told him, scowling. "This drug has unusual properties—you must have read about it. It expands the threshold of consciousness, alters the time-sense. From some reports, it even gives the illusion of time-traveling. And the potentials of a new derivative like this have never been explored."

"You're going to monkey around with it, eh?" Stanley Hunter murmured. "I suppose that means you'll be cluttering the place up with a lot of guinea-pigs again."

"Not at all," Tom assured him. "There's only one way to test this preparation, and that's subjectively."

"You mean you intend to swallow the stuff?" his partner groaned. "Be careful, boy! Remember the time I decided to take a nip of cantharadin—"

"Don't worry, it can't harm me in this quantity." Tom's eyes gleamed behind the spectacles. "Think of the possibilities, man! Suppose we could alter our perception sufficiently to really travel in time—

there's no end to what might happen."

"Maybe so." Stanley Hunter tipped his homburg. "Go ahead and play around with it this afternoon if you like. As for me, there's no time like the present, I always say. And I intend to make the most of it."

"Off to the races?" Tom inquired.

"Just off." Stanley Hunter whistled and sauntered toward the door. "Take it easy, now. Don't mess with the mescaline."

He made his exit, but Tom was scarcely aware of his departure. Already he had pen and notebook ready. He buzzed his receptionist and instructed her not to disturb him with any calls, then drew the blinds and sat down behind his desk again. He uncorked the vial.

400 mgs. of a new mescaline hydrochloride derivative, swallowed at—let's see now—1:30 p.m. April 12th.

He made the notation, then hesitated.

Actually, this was all very unscientific. What he ought to do was bring in a volunteer,

rig up a whole series of testing devices to check reactions, conduct the experiment in the presence of a physician. That was the scientific way.

But then Tom, being a true scientist, *was* unscientific. He wanted, more than anything else, to enjoy the thrill of a new discovery; the intimate, personal thrill of being *first*. The first to explore a new realm of hyperconsciousness, a new dimension of awareness, a new world of sensation. If Stanley Hunter thought this was a nice day for sex, then why wasn't it a nice day for something completely novel, something transcending sex?

Tom blinked at the thought. Sex. Hadn't he better call Ann first, just in case something *could* happen? But no, there was no sense in needlessly alarming her. And besides, she generally took a nap in the early part of the afternoon. He could tell her all about it tonight. But right now—

TOM raised the vial to his lips and drank.

For a moment nothing happened.

For an hour nothing happened.

For a century nothing happened.

Except that Tom was aware he couldn't estimate duration—moment, hour, century were all the same. He tried to focus his eyes on his wrist-watch, but he couldn't find it. He couldn't find his wrist, he couldn't find his arm, he couldn't find his body.

He had no body.

He just *was*.

Where were the glowing colors Huxley and the others had written about? Where were the strange sounds, the weird visions? Tom was conscious only of himself, swirling in emptiness.

But he *was* conscious, *was* himself. He could still reason logically. This wasn't the usual mescaline reaction because he hadn't swallowed the usual compound. He'd taken something new. *This* was something new.

All at once, he was back in his own body again, back in his own office. He could feel, he could see. Everything remained unchanged. There was a slight humming sensation, a

faint vibration, and his vision wavered just a trifle as though what he saw was being projected by a faulty television-tube. But there were no hallucinations. He was aware of a normal self in a normal world.

For a moment he was conscious only of a terrible disappointment. To have expected so much and then to get no reaction at all!

Tom stood up, and then it happened.

He burned.

He began to burn all over. That's the way Stanley Hunter had said he felt, the time he swallowed the cantharadin extract. That's the way Tom himself had felt, with Ann, on their honeymoon.

A nice day for sex.

No reaction, eh?

Tom began to tremble. This stuff had a reaction, all right. A totally unexpected one, but it was there. He felt like a satyr, like Pan, like Elvis Presley doing a second chorus.

His hand reached out to press the buzzer. He'd get his secretary in here, that's what he'd do, and—

No. Ann wouldn't like that. Besides, he didn't have to. Because he had Ann, didn't he? Ann was home right now, in bed, taking a nap.

All he had to do was sneak out the side-door, hail a cab, drive home, open the door, tip-toe upstairs—

And something *had* happened to his time-sense after all, because he was *doing* those very things, doing them so rapidly he was scarcely conscious of a moment elapsing.

On the other hand, maybe his consciousness was completely preoccupied with the burning sensation. All he could think of was his body.

Now he was going through the downstairs hallway, noting the table next to the stairway. No letters on it. Good. He wasn't in the mood to stop and read any letters, anyway. All he could think of was his body. And hers.

HER body was on the bed, in the bedroom. The shades were down, but he could see her. The gorgeous gleaming. It was warm, and she hadn't bothered to wear anything.

Ann, sleeping. The gorgeous gleaming. The burning. Should he wake her up? Yes, but in his own way.

Tom set about it, and apparently she had no objections to his methods. In fact her cooperation was altogether—and mutually—satisfactory.

Then the burning subsided and there was only the gorgeous gleaming, and Ann giggling, "Oh, Tom you surprised me!"

"Didn't I, though?"

"Yes." She sighed, snuggling gracefully, then stiffened. "But think of the chance you're taking! What if *he* found out?"

"He?"

"Stanley, of course."

"Stanley Hunter? You mean my partner? What's he got to do with us?"

"He'd have plenty to do if he knew about this." Ann giggled again. "Don't forget, he's more than your partner. He also happens to be *my* husband."

"Stanley—your husband?"

"Maybe you have your dates mixed, darling. Is today the day you planned to sneak in

on some other girl, you bachelor wolf, you? Get with it, boy—this is Ann Hunter you're talking to."

Tom tried to read her face in the dimness. "Are you kidding?" he gasped. "Darling, you're *my* wife."

"It'll never stand up in a court of law," Ann assured him. "Come on, stop teasing. Or if you must tease, think of another way. Like this, for instance."

Ann thought of another way, and Tom pretended he did, too. But actually, all the while he was conscious of reeling instead of reality.

He was the bachelor and Ann was married to Stanley. But that was impossible! He *knew* who he was, what had happened. He didn't have anything wrong with his memory. He recalled meeting Ann four years ago. Why, Stanley had even introduced them. Maybe Stanley had gone with her for a while before then, but he had no intentions of ever marrying her. And he hadn't married her. Tom did. He remembered their wedding-day, their honeymoon, everything. Stan-

ley was still a bachelor. Just this afternoon he'd walked in to the office and—

The office. That's where Tom had swallowed the mescalin derivative.

It all came back to him now, and so did the consciousness of that faint humming vibration. The room was shimmering, even Ann's gorgeous gleaming rippled in waves.

"Darling, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Got to go now."

THEN everything speeded up like a fast film, or a tape-recorder being run at double speed. What he said and what Ann said sounded like gobbling. He was dressing, walking, running, hailing a cab, riding, zooming up in the elevator, opening the door, falling into his chair behind the desk. He was falling, falling, falling—

And he landed.

Landed in his own office, landed at precisely 3:10 by the watch on his wrist, which was ticking normally now without the slightest suggestion of a humming noise in the background to interfere.

There was no vibration, no burning sensation. All Tom knew was that he was tired, and drenched with perspiration.

He reached for the carafe on the desk and poured himself a glass of water.

What a nightmare!

Then he stared down at the empty vial. Suppose it hadn't been a nightmare? He'd swallowed the stuff, hadn't he? And passed out for a little over two hours?

But any other explanation was absurd. The whole thing was a trick of the subconscious. Sure, that was the answer. The old subconscious. Instead of expanding perception, this drug expanded the imagination.

Tom nodded wisely at himself in the silver, mirror-like reflection of the water-carafe. Then he leaned forward and stared.

Even the blurred image showed the red stains on his mouth and face.

He rubbed a finger across his lips, then brought his hand away. He recognized the lipstick smudges, and now he could smell a familiar perfume. Ann's perfume.

So he *had* been somewhere. Where?

The answer was beginning to form. He'd hoped for a time-travelling effect, but the drug didn't exactly work that way.

Suppose, instead, it opened another doorway? A doorway to a world of *if*, a parallel world existing in a dimension side-by-side with our own, an *alternate* universe?

In this world, Stanley had married Ann and rented the same house Tom would have picked.

Now he was getting confused, because it wasn't a question of "would have picked"—Tom *had* picked the house in the present world. If this *was* the present world.

TOM had to find out. He knew he had to find out at once, or he couldn't stand it. Maybe it was a toxic reaction from the drug, but he knew he was on the verge of flipping.

But what to do? He couldn't just get on the phone and call Ann and ask her if he was really her husband in this world.

"Get a grip on yourself," he muttered. "There's an easier way. A sensible way."

And he found it. Carefully wiping the rest of the lipstick from his face, Tom buzzed his secretary. "Mr. Hunter, still out? All right." He hesitated, then took a deep breath. "Did my wife call?"

"No, Mr. Morton."

Tom clicked off, the grateful sigh rushing from his lips. "No" meant "Yes." It meant yes, he *was* married, Ann *was* his wife, he *was* in this world.

The best of all possible worlds, he told himself.

All this business of yearning for new sensations was nonsense. He ought to be content with what he had. Ann, for example.

And right now, even without the burning sensation to incite him, he was pleased to go home. With the curious feeling of retracing his footsteps, he left by the side entrance, hailed a cab, and drove to his house.

This time the sense of duration was normal. There was no humming or buzzing to interfere with his thoughts as he rode.

The mescalín derivative, now—what was to be done about it? Should he go ahead and set up an orthodox full-dress experiment?

No. Too dangerous. If what he had experienced was any indication, it would be better to forget the whole thing. Tell the boys in the lab they'd come up with a dud.

Maybe the doors had better remain closed. It was an ugly place. Best if no one else ever blundered into it.

Actually, he couldn't even tell Ann what had happened. She wouldn't like the idea of being an unfaithful wife, even in another world.

Tom made up his mind as he paid the cab-driver and went up the front steps.

His eyes searched out the name-plate in the mailbox. *Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Morton*. That resolved all his doubts.

He was in the right world at last. And at the right time. Upstairs Ann might still be in bed, gorgeously gleaming. And he could tiptoe in and awaken her—

Tom did tiptoe, into the hall.

He got as far as the stairs, then glanced at the little table. There were no letters on it.

But resting on the table-top were Stanley Hunter's gray homburg and his matching gloves.

Tom paused, staring.

This was it, then. He was in the right world, at the right time. And he could go upstairs and surprise his wife and his partner and raise a big stink and dissolve the firm and dissolve the marriage and—

The alternative? There *was* an alternative. A whole universe of alternatives, in fact. And somehow, in the light of what he had just discovered, it might not be so ugly after all.

A nice day for sex, eh?

Tom hesitated a moment longer, then smiled—and tiptoed out of the house again.

He wondered how long it would take the boys out in the lab to mix up another batch of that mescalín derivative.

THE END

LOOK TO THE STARS

by SCOTT NEVETS

Those dark spots on Mars, sometimes considered to be signs of vegetation, are probably just solidified volcanic lava. At least, that's the opinion of G. P. Kuiper, a University of Chicago astronomer.

Dr. Kuiper offered this explanation to account for the way in which these areas reappear rapidly after severe Martian dust storms: lava deposits, having glassy surfaces, would be blown clear of dust by the first strong wind.

He had attempted to check this theory last September, when Mars, at 35,120,000 miles away, was at its closest to the Earth in thirty-two years, but surface details were obscured at that time by a veil of yellow haze stirred up by an August dust storm.

Meanwhile, astronomers at the Mount Wilson Observatory revealed this interesting fact:

Phobos, the inner of the two Martian moons, is accelerating and falling closer to the planet; it is in the last one percent of its existence, and will plunge into the surface of Mars in 35,000,000 years.

The Milky Way is not an independent island in space. Astronomers have found evidence that our galaxy is part of a cluster of galaxies, also arranged in the shape of a disk. This "supergalaxy" appears to be rotating as a whole.

The French astronomer Gerard de Vaucouleurs is responsible for proposing this theory, and the idea was confirmed by radio-astronomers at Ohio State University who located other members of the supergalaxy by mapping radiation from the sky.

THE SEARCH FOR SALLY

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Sally was dead. They were all sure she was dead. But somehow Sally still survived. At least her mind had survived because he could sense her random thoughts

NOVELETTE

illustrated by EMSH

THEY SAT together on the settee in the waiting room, the man and the girl. Both were wearing spacesuits, but with the helmets and gloves on the floor at their feet. His suit was of the rugged Service pattern and carried Chief Pilot's stars on the shoulders. Hers was the lighter civilian model.

They sat together, as closely as the heavy, insulated clothing would allow. He held her left hand in his right, seemed to be savouring, with desperate intensity, this last,

slight contact. They looked out through the wide window to the slim, shining, wide-winged rocket standing on the scarred concrete, looked beyond the rocket to the ruddy bulk of Mars looming gigantic against the black sky with its bright, unwinking stars.

He looked away from the window suddenly, turned his head to study, for the last time (*But it's only au revoir*, he told himself, *it's only au re-voir*) the thin, serious face of the girl; the brown eyes, the coppery glints in her hair, the



fine structure of facial bones and skull.

She turned to look at him.

"But it's only *au revoir*," she said.

"At times I wonder why we bother talking," he murmured.

"I like to hear your voice, my dear," she replied.

"And I yours," he said.

He looked again through the window.

He said, "It was a good planet leave. Thank you, my darling."

"It was good being with you this last few days on Phobos," she replied. "Even though you weren't as free as we would have liked."

He looked at her again. He thought, *It will be a long time. Twenty months Earth time.*

"Twenty months will soon pass," she said. "I hope."

"It'd better," he replied.

"And then you'll make your last voyage out here. And you'll be Captain of a little rocket like that..." She gestured towards the slim shape of the ferry. "Are you sure you aren't giving up too much?"

"Quite sure."

An amplified voice began to speak. "All passengers for

Flight Seventeen, Phobos to Mars, attention please. Put on your gloves and helmets. Leave the waiting room by the airlock."

THE spaceman picked up the girl's helmet, then put it down again. He took her hands in his, put his lips to hers. After the kiss he bent down, picked up the helmet once more, deftly screwed it into place. He helped her on with the heavy gloves, checked all the fastenings of her suit. He watched her walk to the inner airlock door, graceful in spite of the negligible gravity, the cumbersome suit. He stood by the window and watched her, together with the other dozen passengers, walk out to the waiting ferry rocket. He saw the passengers board the ferry.

He saw the crimson warning pyrotechnics soar and hang above the landing field, saw the blue incandescence flicker and flare from the rocket's main venturi—and then she was gone, gone; was no more than a tiny blue spark falling down the black sky toward the ruddy bulk of Mars.

He put on his own helmet and gloves then, left the waiting room by the airlock that opened upon the spaceport. He walked slowly towards the tall, ungainly construction of pressure spheres and latticework girders that was his own ship. He wished—as he had so often wished this time on Phobos—that he could have paid off here, that the Line had allowed him to break his Contract. *But I have to be fair*, he thought. *They couldn't replace me here, and the Second's too young and inexperienced. It was decent of them to promise me a working passage out. But...Twenty months!*

He felt her thoughts in reply. *It won't be long, darling. We won't let it be long.*

All right, he thought. *We won't let it be long.*

He stepped into the elevator cage, pressed the button that sent the flimsy structure climbing to the airlock door of the crew accommodation. Once through the lock he removed first his gloves, then his helmet. He saw that Wade, the Captain, was standing watching him.

"Seen your girl friend off,

Mr. Kent?" asked the Captain. "About time. Time you were taking some interest in the loading of this ship."

"The loading is progressing satisfactorily, sir," said Kent stiffly.

"Is it? *Is it?* I'm far from satisfied with the distribution of weight. I told you that I wanted a sixty-fifty-forty ratio between the three compartments..."

"And you'll get it, sir. The radio-actives are still to be loaded in 'A' Chamber, and with their mass and the mass of the lead shielding..."

"Oh, all right. But the ratio had better be the way I want it when we blast off. That's all."

Kent went to his cabin, busied himself with tally sheets, plans and sliderule. Suddenly he knew, without warning, that something was wrong, dreadfully, irrevocably wrong. It was two hours later that the news came over the radio that Flight Seventeen, Phobos to Mars, had crashed on Mount Kinsey and that there were no survivors.

"MAKE your mind up, Mr. Kent," said Captain Travers. "First of all you want to resign and take a working passage out to Mars. Then you withdraw your reservation and ask for a transfer to the Venus run. And now you're back to where you started, wanting to resign again..."

Kent looked across the desk to the stocky, white-haired Astronautical Superintendent.

"I'm sorry if I've caused any inconvenience, sir," he said slowly.

"You have caused inconvenience, Mr. Kent, considerable inconvenience. Not only right now, but in the near future. However, it has always been our policy to be generous towards resigning officers, especially when by their resigning they are helping to swell the population of the colonies..." He made a steeple of his fingers, looked over them. "As I understand it from Captain Wade you met this girl on the last outward voyage of *Martian Queen*, fell in love with her and spent all of your planet leave with her. You decided to marry..."

"That is correct, sir."

"You had a job lined up—pilot of one of the ferry rock-ets."

"Yes."

"And then...?"

"She spent the last few days on Phobos with me. She decided not to stay to see the ship blast off—apart from anything else she had to get back to her own job; she was secretary to one of the big shots in the Ministry of Immigration. I saw her go. The ferry rocket crashed on Mars."

"A berth on the Venus run is still open," said the Superintendent.

"Thank you, sir. But I want to get back to Mars."

"But why, man, *why*? You'll be better off away from the memories—far better off. You need never see Mars again..."

"But I must," said Kent simply. He leaned forward over the desk, his elbows on the polished wood, his hands gripped together, the knuckles white. Travers noticed suddenly the grey hairs scattered thickly over the head that at their last meeting, less than a

year ago, had been black; noticed the new, deep lines in the strong face.

"Yes," he said. "Why?"

"We were always telepatheric," said the Chief Pilot slowly. "Sally would transmit and I would receive, or I'd transmit and she would receive. Oh, we never got around to sending any reports in to the Rhine Institute or anything like that. If she'd lived, we might have done..."

"Anyhow—I *knew* when that ferry rocket crashed. I knew that something had happened to Sally. I knew that she was dead. That's when I requested the withdrawal of my resignation and asked for a transfer to the Venus run. Where Sally should have been in my thoughts there was... *nothing*."

"Then why have you changed your mind?"

"Sally's alive. I *know* it. I can feel her. She wants me."

"But you said she was dead."

"I *thought* she was dead. This must have been the way of it. When that ferry rocket crashed there was a...mess. And there was a fire. They

were never able to identify any of the dead—what little was left of them. It must have been like this. Sally was hurt—concussion, perhaps. She got out of the wreck. She wandered away. She was an amnesiac. Have you ever been out to the Kinsey Range? Solid rock, it is. No sand. Nothing to take footprints. Nobody would know, until now, that anybody had escaped from the ferry.

"But Sally's memory is coming back now. She's beginning to remember who she is. She's beginning to remember me. She wants me—and she knows that I'll be coming to help her."

"But where would she be?" asked the superintendent.

"I don't know. That's the worst of it. I get a confused vision of confining bars, of gigantic, vague shapes. She may have wandered into one of the ruined cities—and, as you know, there are persistent rumours to the effect that a handful of the old Martians still survive. And they were...big."

"So you want to resign," said Travers. "You want a

working passage out to Mars..."

"I can pay my own fare," said Kent.

"You'll want money to live on while you're scouring the Martian deserts on your wild goose chase. I don't believe your story, Kent. I can't believe it. But—you'd never have been an officer in the Line if there'd ever been the slightest doubt of your sanity. I'll tell Captain Wade that you'll be coming along, one way passage, as Supernumerary. Get ready to hand over to Mr. Grant. And..." he got to his feet, held out his hand. "Good luck. You'll need it."

"Thank you, sir," said Kent.

THE next ten months dragged. Ten months of free fall, ten months cooped up in a tiny, man-made world, would have been bad enough with the certainty of Sally at the end of them. But there was no certainty.

That was the trouble—there was no certainty. He *knew* that Sally was, somehow, somewhere, alive—but he did not know *if* he would find her. The telepathic messages

that he received were too vague to give him any clues as to where she was. There was, always, the impression of confinement, of dimly seen giant beings that moved around her. There was the impression of helplessness—and, above all, the impression of loneliness.

Even so—Time, no matter how it may drag, passes. At last came the day when the ship, her rockets flaring fitfully, dropped to the Phobos spaceport. It was a strange experience for Kent—to be strapped into his acceleration couch, a mere passenger, during landing stations. It was a strange—and rather shattering—experience. It was the final proof that he was not indispensable.

However, the ship managed to land, somehow, without his having taken an active part in proceedings. She landed—and Kent, together with the other passengers, went through the usual formalities—medical inspection, examination by Customs and Immigration authorities. He did not walk with the other passengers to the waiting ferry rocket—he was having a farewell drink with Captain

Wade and Mr. Grant. The rocket was only two and a half minutes late in blasting off.

During the trip between Phobos and Mars he sat silently, not joining in the conversation of the passengers. He was concentrating, trying, by effort of will, to throw his mind open to any messages emanating from Sally. It seemed to him that the messages were stronger now, much stronger—but they were no clearer. Sally was alive. Sally was on Mars. Comforting as the knowledge was, it was not enough. It would never be enough until, once again, he held Sally in his arms.

HE was first out of the rocket when she set down at the New Essendon airport. He hurried at once to the administration building, asked the receptionist, as soon as he had removed his helmet, for the Captain Superintendent of the ferry service. He was known to Captain Dale, of course, and was not kept waiting for more than a few minutes.

Dale got to his feet as Kent entered his office.

"Glad to see Kent! How soon do you want to start?"

"Want to start, sir? Oh, that pilot's job. I forgot...I'm sorry, sir, I shan't be available for a while. I called in to make some inquiries."

"I though you made them all last time you were on Mars."

"Not about the job, sir. About that crash you had almost a year—an Earth year—ago."

"Let me see, now...*Falcon* it would have been...On Mount Kinsey..." He lifted a telephone from his desk, spoke into it. "Miss Davis—bring in the *Falcon* file, will you?" The competent, middle-aged woman brought in the thick folder of papers. "Thank you. That will do." He turned to Kent. "I remember, now. I heard that a friend of yours was among those lost."

"There were no survivors?" asked Kent.

"No."

"Tell me this, sir. Were all the passengers accounted for?"

"No identification of bodies was possible," said Dale.

"Never mind the identifica-

tion. How many people were in the rocket—crew and passengers?”

“Twenty three,” said the Captain Superintendent.

“And did the salvage party,” asked Kent, “find twenty three skulls? Or forty six thigh bones?”

“What are you driving at?” demanded Dale. “As a matter of fact—it’s all in here—it seems that at least seven of the bodies must have been completely destroyed. What are you driving at?”

“I have reason to believe,” said Kent, “that at least one of those passengers survived. I have reason to believe that she wandered away from the wreck—dazed, possibly insane. I have reason to believe that she is alive still—somewhere among the canyons, among the caves. And I am going to find her.”

“But there were no survivors.”

“How do you *know*? You don’t. Everybody blandly assumed that there weren’t any—and there’s not an atom of proof for the assumption...”

“Excepting for the fact that *Falcon* struck hard enough to melt both rock and metal.”

“You know, as well as I do, Captain, that there have been some fantastic accidents—cases of fragile humans surviving, unscratched, catastrophes that have shattered their stoutest constructions. This is one of those cases.”

“How do you *know*?”

“My friend was a telepath,” said Kent. “*Is* a telepath. So am I. Nothing spectacular, certainly not good enough to take up commercially—but we have the gift. For the first few months after the crash she was—telepathically—dead. Then she started coming through. She must have recovered from the...the blow on the head? She’s alive, anyhew. But where?”

“H’m,” grunted Dale. “I’m just an astronaut turned airman—I certainly don’t know enough to question the findings of the Rhine Institute. Even so...All right,” he said abruptly. “What can I do to help you?”

“You’ve already given me access to your files,” replied Kent. “With your permission I’ll borrow the reports for further study. I’d like a letter of introduction to the Chief of

Police, also one to the editor of the local rag. I shall be wanting to hire some sort of aircraft—preferably one of those turret drive Spurlings. You'll be able to help me there..."

"Anything else?"

"Can you think of anything, sir?"

"Yes. I know an old boy called Wilberforce—he's a Fellow of the Rhine Institute. I'll give you a letter of introduction to him, too."

"He could help," said Kent.

"Good," said Dale. He spoke into his office telephone. "Miss Davis—send a girl in to take some letters, will you?"

KENT took the monorail from Essendon to Marsala, obtained a room at the Hotel Royal without any difficulty. By this time it was late afternoon, and although he rang as soon as he had registered he was unable to catch either Bradbury, the Editor of the *Martian Chronicle*, or Cope, the Chief of Police, in his office. Wilberforce's number he found in the book—the address tallied

with that on the envelope containing Dale's letter of introduction. Mr. Wilberforce, said a bad tempered female voice, was not in; furthermore, he had left no word as to what time he would be in.

Kent went up to his room, shed, with a feeling of relief, the cumbersome spacesuit. He showered hastily, dressed in a smart but comfortable suit of coveralls. He thought of ringing for a drink and sandwiches, then decided against it. He was neither hungry nor in need of stimulant. The feeling of Sally's presence was almost unbearably strong—her presence (but *where?*), her loneliness, her need.

He left the hotel. Looking up, he saw that the sky above the transparent dome covering the city was dark, almost black. Abruptly the street lights came on—the street lights and a sparse scattering of neon signs. One he noticed—a huge affair of pseudo Gothic lettering. *Martian Chronicle*, he read. He knew that he was being irrational, but he was pleased, regarded this as a good omen. He would not have far to search for the place

where he intended to start his investigation.

There was a bored receptionist on duty in the foyer of the building. She looked up from her magazine after he had coughed twice.

"Yeah? Whadya want?"

"The Editor."

"He's gone."

"The News Editor, then..."

"Gone. On holiday."

"I suppose you run to a Night Editor?"

"Yeah."

"Could I see him, please?"

The girl spoke into a telephone. "Mr. Gilbert—guy here t'see ya. Yeah. Spaceman I'd say...No, he's not in uniform...Yeah." She looked up at Kent. "What business, Mister?"

"A story," said Kent. "Tell him it's a story."

"Guy says he's a story for ya. Yeah. Okay." Then, to Kent, "Up stairs. 'Long corridor. End door."

She picked up her magazine again.

RAPIDLY Kent climbed the stairs, walked along the corridor. At the end, as the girl had told him, was a door la-

belled NEWS EDITOR. Kent rapped on this, opened it and walked through almost before the occupant of the room had time to say, "Come in."

The man behind the desk—thin, gangling, almost bald—got to his feet. He held out his hand, asked, "Mr. ...?"

"Kent," said the spaceman, shaking the proffered hand. "Late Chief Pilot in the Martian Mail Line."

"Sit down, Mr. Kent. What can we do for you? What can you do for us?"

"I want to make enquiries," said Kent, "about the *Falcon* disaster. I have reason to believe that one of the passengers is still alive..."

"Impossible," said Gilbert.

"No," said Kent flatly.

"If there should be a survivor," murmured Gilbert, "it'd make a story. A good one. But what grounds have you for your belief, Mr. Kent?"

Kent told him.

"H'm. Possible, but...You don't hold a Rhine Institute Diploma, do you?"

"No."

"A pity. Indeed a pity. You never mentioned this telepathic hookup between yourself and

your fiance to anybody else, did you? Never gave any demonstrations?"

"No. It was always...private."

"I see."

"But such cases aren't rare..."

"I know they're not. And I know, too, that the Rhine Institute goes gunning for any paper that supports any faker or charlatan."

"That shouldn't worry you."

"Shouldn't it? With old Wilberforce, who owns the Utility Stores, our biggest advertiser. Wilberforce is also the local Rhine Institute representative. Why don't you see Wilberforce, by the way?"

"I intend to. He wasn't in when I rang."

"Ah, let me see, now...Oh, yes. He was in here, four or five days ago, trying to talk us into giving him some financial backing. He'll never spend his own money when he can use somebody else's—I guess that's why he could buy up *The Chronicle*, stock and staff, without noticing it! He has quite a reputation as an archaeologist, and he's taken an expedition to explore the ravines

and caves around Mount Kinsey. He's convinced that one day he'll charge in here dragging a real, live Old Martian behind on a piece of string..."

"So he believes that the Old Martians are still living?"

"There're a few who do. If they ever do find one—it'll be NEWS!"

"I believe it myself."

"Do you, now? Well, if you ever find one, Mister—ask your own price for the story. Within reason, of course."

And I can feel you, thought Kent, I can feel you wanting me. I can feel your loneliness and your fear—and I have to sit here bandying words with this Smart Aleck... Mount Kinsey, Sally, does it mean anything? Is that where you are? Is the hidden city of the Old Martians—those dimly seen giants of yours—there? In a ravine, or a cave...

"I said," almost shouted Gilbert, "that we're willing to go fifty-fifty on reasonable expenses, and that we'll buy your story—System Rights—if you find the girl."

"Sorry," said Kent. "I was...thinking. Well—you might be able to help. You will be.

I shall want a 'plane—one of those turret drive Spurlings—and supplies..."

"Wilberforce uses camels," said Gilbert.

"I can handle a Spurling," said Kent, "but..."

"Can't say that I blame you," remarked Gilbert. "Tell me, are the brutes as bad-tempered back on Earth as they are here?"

THE following day was a busy one for Kent. He interviewed Cope, the Chief of Police, as early in the morning as possible, but was unable to learn anything more about the *Falcon* disaster than he already knew. Cope assured him, too, that during the past year there had been no unidentified persons, either living or dead, reported—all of which added up to mean that Sally, if she were indeed an amnesiac, had never succeeded in reaching any of the colony's cities or settlements.

Bradbury, the Editor, was helpful, assisted Kent to look through the files of back numbers for any information that might be of value. Regarding the crash itself there was

nothing new. The reports Kent had borrowed from Captain Dale were more comprehensive than those printed in *The Chronicle*. There were, however, some issues with articles by Wilberforce on the Old Martian ruins and artifacts. These articles were, as Bradbury pointed out, of a highly speculative nature, little more, in parts, than (possibly) inspired guesswork. Kent put these to one side.

It was Bradbury who arranged for the hire of the Spurling, who advised upon charts, food, clothing and other supplies. It was Bradbury who said, "I hope I get the story, Kent; but I hope even more that you find your woman."

"Thank you," said Kent.

He motioned to Doyle, the *Chronicle* photographer who was to accompany him, to climb into the cabin of the Spurling, shook hands with the fat little Editor and then pulled himself up and into the body of the aircraft. The door of the pressure cabin slid shut. Smoothly, rapidly, the plane lifted, almost vertically and then, her jets swinging to the horizontal, screamed east-

wards towards Mount Kinsey and Wilberforce's camp.

DELIBERATELY, Kent had timed his arrival for a little after sunset. It would be difficult, he knew, to spot the encampment from the air by day—and it would be impossible to spot it from the air by night after the archaeologist had retired to his bed and extinguished his Solar battery powered lamps. As it was, the spaceman picked up the plastic pressure tent during his first circuit of the mountain, saw it shining in the shadows like a tiny, misplaced moon.

He swung the Spurling, then set her hovering on vertical jets while he and Doyle consulted their charts. These showed that Wilberforce had made his camp on a plateau jutting out, like a shelf, from the steep side of the mountain. It seemed to Kent that such a site would offer little, if any protection from the frequent sandstorms. He said as much, and Doyle agreed with him. They decided that a parachute flare would give them a better idea of the terrain beneath them.

They released the flare. Almost immediately the transceiver started an irritable buzzing. Doyle flipped the switch to TRANSMIT, said, "Spurling Number 143X speaking. Come in please." He switched to RECEIVE.

"Come in yourself, whoever you are. Either come in or bugger off back to where you came from. You're driving my camels frantic. Over."

"Is there a decent landing?" asked Kent. "All we can see is a mess of confused shadows. Over."

"Hang on," replied Wilberforce. "I'll put out a light for you. And land just to the east of it—not *on* it. Can you manage that? Over?"

They waited, saw the bright, steady light being carried out from the glowing bulk of the tent. They waited until Wilberforce told them that all was clear for their landing, then commenced a slow, cautious descent. Kent cut the drive as the Spurling landed. She creaked badly, tilting to starboard. She steadied then, and both men put on their suit helmets.

Kent was out first. He

looked around him. The bright rays of the portable lantern were reflected from huge boulders, standing all around them like sentinels. Wilberforce, he thought, need fear no sandstorms here. Doyle joined him.

"A nice landing," he said.

"Could have been worse," admitted Kent. He turned to meet the tall figure, thin even in the bulky Mars-suit, advancing towards them out of the black shadows.

"Who are you?" asked Wilberforce, a defective helmet diaphragm adding a rattle to the already unpleasant rasp of the voice.

"Doyle, Mr. Wilberforce," said the photographer.

"And who is this with you?"

"Mr. Kent," said Doyle. "He used to be Chief Pilot with the Martian Mail..."

"All right. Better come in, both of you. If you've a bottle, bring that too."

HE waited until Kent had returned to the plane for a bottle of whisky, then picked up the lantern and led the way over the rocky ground,

through the haphazardly placed boulders, to his camp. He passed far too close to the tethered camels for the peace of mind of either the spaceman or the photographer, both of whom jumped back as long, snaky necks and bared, yellow teeth reached out for them.

"Filthy brutes," muttered Doyle. "What always annoys me is that *they* can get by without suits or helmets, whereas we..."

"Even the *Martian Chronicle*," said Wilberforce sardonically, "could not popularise a measure to introduce selective breeding and controlled mutation for human stock."

Wilberforce was first through the sphincter airlock of the tent. Doyle followed him. Kent, still clutching the precious bottle, was last. The three men removed their gloves and helmets, shrugged off their suits. Wilberforce motioned briefly to a young, nondescript-looking man standing to one side, said, "My assistant, Bill Craddock. Get the mugs, Bill, will you?"

Craddock picked the bottle from the floor where Kent had left it, put it carefully on a folding table. He produced

from somewhere four plastic beakers, put them beside the bottle. He set out two folding chairs, two crates.

Kent studied Wilberforce. At first glance he was not impressed. The man was emaciated, a mere walking mummy. A few sparse strands of yellowish hair clung to a cranium that seemed to be bare bone rather than covered with flesh and blood and skin. The great jutting nose was out of place on that pallid skull—a ragged orifice would have been far more in keeping. Yet—there was a power in those deepset, yellowish eyes; power, and wisdom and, Kent noted with surprise, compassion.

"Sit down," said the archaeologist.

He took his own seat—one of the folding chairs. Craddock stood back politely, waited until the guests were seated (each lowered himself carefully to one of the flimsy looking crates) then sat down himself.

Wilberforce's long, skinny hands were already on the bottle. He tore the plastic away from the cap, removed the cap

itself and threw it into the corner. He half-filled each of the beakers, remarking to Doyle, "Your Editor owes me a drink."

Kent gulped his whisky without waiting for the others. Sally, somehow, was very far away and he hoped that the alcohol, by the loosening of his inhibitions, would help to put him once more in touch with her. Wilberforce raised his own beaker, said with dry irony, "Your very good health, Mr. Kent."

"This *was* my whisky," said Kent.

"Was it? H'm... You could be right at that. It's certainly better than the rotgut Bradbury keeps in his office."

Sally, thought Kent, trying hard to project his thoughts. Sally, I've come looking for you. I've come to find you, darling. Where are you?

"What do you want of me, Mr. Kent?" asked the archaeologist.

"You, sir," said Kent, "are the leading authority on the Old Martian civilisation. Do you believe the story that some of the Old Martians survive, that there are under-

ground cities in which they are still living?"

"Yes," said Wilberforce slowly. "Yes. There is evidence—not as definite as I would like—but still evidence. In this very area, for example... Oh, no, Doyle—don't go taking any notes. You'll have your story when there's a story to tell. I don't want any more *Mad Millionaire's Wild Goose Chase* headlines in your cheap little rag."

"I have reason to believe," went on Kent, "that one of the passengers in the *Falcon*—she crashed near here—survived the disaster, wandered away from the wreckage and fell into the hands of giant beings... I have reason to believe that she is a prisoner, and helpless..."

"What makes you think that her captors are giants?" asked Wilberforce.

"It's a matter of telepathy..." began Kent.

"Telepathy! Doyle—didn't your Editor promise not to send any more cranks and charlatans to get in my hair? I may be the local representative of the Institute—but that doesn't give any Tom, Dick or

Harry the right to bother me—neither does it give Bradbury the right to sic them on to me!"

"Mr. Wilberforce, I am neither a crank nor a charlatan. You should know that the rigorous psychological tests applied to all Space personnel makes the first impossible. As for the second—I have thrown up my job and come all the way to Mars. I was prepared to make my investigations at my own expense entirely. Mr. Bradbury's financial help was unsolicited—although it is, of course, deeply appreciated."

"H'm. Seems genuine enough. Suppose you tell me the whole story, from the beginning. I'm not promising that I *will* help you, but it's just possible... Go ahead, now."

WHEN Kent had finished, the archaeologist was silent for a few minutes. He said at last, "I believe you."

"Then you'll help?"

"My dear young man—it isn't a question of *will* I help—it's one of *can* I help? It's a great pity that you didn't think to get in touch with the

Institute before you left Earth. There's an instrument—Bladen invented it, Dinshaw developed it—analogous to the radio compass used by you people. It will give a bearing on any source of telepathic transmission. If we had one here now..."

"We could send for one," suggested Kent, conscious of the vast time lag between the transmission of the message and the arrival of the instrument.

"There's no need to," said Craddock suddenly. "You are forgetting, sir, that the Institute is shipping one out to us, *has* shipped one out to us. It was to have been loaded aboard *Martian Queen*."

"And *Martian Queen's* in now," almost shouted Kent.

"You were the *Martian Mail*," said Wilberforce. "When should the thing be unloaded?"

"I didn't look at the stowage plan," admitted Kent. "After all, I was only a passenger this last trip. But it will, almost certainly, have been in one of the special cargo lockers and, therefore, among the first out, among the shipments on

the first freight ferry. If it wasn't delivered yesterday it will have been delivered today." He got to his feet. "If Mr. Craddock or yourself would come with me, I could fly us back to New Essendon right away, and..."

"Not so fast. You'll be using the thing—if it has come. You'll have to be alert mentally—which you won't be if you spend all night flitting madly back and forth over the Martian desert. Furthermore—it may be that I shall be requiring more than this telepathic compass from my house. If it leads us into one of the cities, and if the city is, as you suggest, still inhabited, it may well be that the inhabitants will not give up their prisoner without a struggle. We'll finish this excellent whisky, Kent—and then you and Doyle will go back to your plane to sleep. Bill and I will make out a shopping list after you've gone—and then *we'll* sleep."

KENT was surprised that he slept so well. The whisky helped, of course—and so did

the knowledge that at last he was *doing* something, that at last he could expect his reunion with Sally within a few days. He was still sleeping when Wilberforce and Craddock came and hammered on the fuselage of the Spurling. He got up, let them, one by one, through the little airlock.

"Here's the list," said Wilberforce, without preamble. "I've already been in radio touch with Marsala—all you'll have to do is pick up the things at New Essendon."

"What about breakfast?" asked Doyle sleepily.

"We don't..." began Kent.

"You do, Mr. Kent. I've already told you—I want you fit and fresh. You and Doyle get into your suits, then come across to the tent. We haven't finished all the coffee, and there're a couple or three eggs..."

The astronaut and the photographer followed the others back to the tent, sidestepping, on the way, the vicious camels. Kent ate and drank hastily, cursing the too leisurely Doyle. He had his gloves and helmet still on while the newsman was

still wiping egg from his chin, was through the sphincter lock of the tent while Doyle was still putting on his helmet.

He sat, fidgetting impatiently, at the controls of the Spurling while Doyle walked from the tent to the plane, took her up with a gut-wrenching acceleration before the photographer was through the inner airlock door.

With course set for New Essendon (speed Maximum) he cut in the automatic pilot, relaxed a little. He ignored Doyle's attempts at making conversation—just as he had ignored, early, the other man's annoyance at the hasty take-off. He sat in silence, trying hard to push a message through to Sally. He knew that she knew he was on Mars, he knew that she knew that he was trying to find her. But it was all so vague. He received, as he had done so many times before, the impression of bars, the impression of the huge, shadowy forms passing backwards and forwards. He found the list of equipment made by Wilberforce and Craddock, was pleased to see that it included heavy calibre automatic pis-

tols. He wondered, briefly, if the shooting down of the Old Martians would be regarded as murder or manslaughter.

But I mustn't shoot, he told himself. Not unless I have to. After all—they have cared for Sally when she was hurt and helpless... Even so— if they try to stop me...

"Essendon a h e a d," said Doyle briefly.

"Thanks," replied Kent.

He cut out the automatic pilot, took the controls himself. At the transceiver Doyle was in touch with the Control Tower.

"All clear for landing," he said.

Kent came in fast, swinging the turretted jets on a forward bearing when he was already over the field. The Spurling quivered, shuddered to a halt—then dropped slowly on her screaming, down pointing exhaust. Kent was in the airlock almost before the undercarriage had ceased to quiver and creak, was running towards the pile of bags and cases while, still in the Spurling, Doyle was adjusting his gloves and helmet.

"I'm from Wilberforce," he barked at a passing airport official. "That his gear?"

"Yes, but..."

"Top priority," snapped the spaceman. "Give me a hand to get it loaded, will you? Here, Doyle—shake the lead out of your pants! Take this end!"

The airport official muttered something about the clearance papers.

"Later," said Kent. "No time now...try it edgeways, Doyle—we have to get it through the door somehow."

"Where am I going to sit?" complained Doyle at last.

"You stand," said Kent, "or you stay. Take your choice." He took the sheet of paper thrust at him by the official, managed, his gloved fingers stiff, a scrawling signature with the stub of pencil. He pushed Doyle into the Spurling, heard him curse as he fell over the untidily piled cases and bags. Once in the pilot's seat he gave the official barely time to get clear of the jets, did not wait for authorization from the Control Tower. His take-off was more like the firing of a large piece of artillery than the

blasting off of either jet or rocket.

"THIS," said Wilberforce, "is it." He tightened the last screw, then stood back from the deceptively uncomplicated-seeming piece of apparatus on the table. Like a cage, it was, a spherical cage of fine, shining wire. There was another sphere suspended in its centre, a sphere of crystal, in which swirled, as though alive, a milky, opalescent fluid. On the outer sphere were connections, to which were made fast the leads of a pair of almost conventional appearing earphones (the shape was conventional enough, but they, too were made of crystal), the three leads running from a square, black box. There were straps on the lattice sphere, more straps on the box.

"You hang the sphere on your back," said Wilberforce. "So. The box you wear on your chest. Yes, that's it. Take off the lid, now."

Kent took off the lid. He, together with Wilberforce, Doyle and Craddock stared down at the bowl inside the

box. It was like no meter that Kent had ever used, had ever seen. Under the flat transparency that covered the bowl was a greenish gas or liquid in which floated bright, flame-colored sparks, their motion seemingly as random as those of the molecules of a gas.

"Put on the headset," ordered the archaeologist.

Kent obeyed him.

"Now—try to get in touch with your woman."

Sally, thought Kent. *Sally. Come in, darling, come in. Sally. I'm here, my sweet. I'm here. I'm looking for you.*

"I'm trying," he said.

"Then try harder. There's nothing showing yet."

... awakening from sleep, and loneliness, and darkness, and hunger...and the huge, dim shape, dim and huge beyond the black bars...and the great hands (but soft, gentle, soft and gentle) outreaching and grasping...softness, warmth...softness, warmth, food... sleep...

Sally, he thought, desperately, *Sally, wake up! Wake up! They know, somehow, and*

they're drugging you!

"Look at the indicator," said Wilberforce.

Kent looked down, saw that the floating sparks had come together, had formed a tight, compact wedge, the point of which held steady on a bearing broad to his left. Automatically he turned so that the pointer was right ahead.

Sally, he thought. Stay awake. Stay awake! Keep sending.

...loneliness, and darkness ...and loneliness...and the dim, vague giants beyond the bars...and the rhythmic, hypnotic chanting...

"Quick, Craddock," ordered Wilberforce. "A compass bearing!"

... darkness, warmth ... warmth ... darkness ... softness ... warmth ... soft ... soft ... so

Kent stared down at the bowl, at the meaningless swirl of little sparks in the green fluid.

"I've lost her," he said flatly. "They drugged her, hypnotised her."

"She has to wake again," Wilberforce consoled him.

"Meanwhile, we have the bearing of wherever she is. Got the maps out, Bill?"

"Yes, sir," said Craddock. "I've laid the bearing off. It passes over Wyndham's Canyon..."

"A hopeful place," said Wilberforce. "I've always thought that there was something there. Get into your spacesuits, all of you."

"Do we walk?" asked Craddock. "Or take the camels?"

"Neither. Kent will fly us in his Spurling."

"Just a minute," asked Kent. "When Sally wakes again—how do we tell if we're close?"

"By the shape of the wedge," said Wilberforce. "The broader the wedge, the closer."

Carefully Kent undid the straps holding the apparatus to his body, carefully he put it into its box. He climbed into his spacesuit, helped the others to carry the necessary supplies and equipment to the Spurling.

IT was late afternoon when Kent set the Spurling down at the entrance to Wyndham's Canyon. For a while the three men—for Craddock, to his in-

tense annoyance, had been left to look after the camp and the camels—sat in the cabin of the plane, staring at the black, vertical fissure in the red cliffs. Outside, the thin, keen wind raised little, whirling dust devils, with particles of mica sparkling like powdered diamonds in the almost level rays of the westering sun.

"You'll have to try again," said Wilberforce. "The canyon's all of a thousand miles long."

"I am trying," said Kent. "Do you think that I'm not trying, you fool?" He said hurriedly, "I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Kent. I understand," said the archaeologist. "It's more important to you than to us."

"Quiet!" ordered Kent. He could feel her, could feel the vague thoughts that moved sluggishly through her mind as she half awakened. In the bowl the bright sparks shifted, aligned themselves into a sharp wedge, a pointer, indicating that the way lay through the canyon.

"You'll have to watch the bowl, Wilberforce," said the

pilot. "I shall have my hands full piloting the plane."

The Spurling lifted, moved slowly towards the red wall of the cliffs, towards the shadowed fissure. Kent switched on the landing lights before entering the canyon—a wise precaution, only a hundred yards inside they were in pitch darkness. To port and starboard he swerved, avoiding sharp pinacles, rounding bends and corners. In normal circumstances the pilotage would not have been easy—but he was able to attend to the navigation of the aircraft with one part only of his mind—and that the smaller part. He was fighting all the time to maintain the tenuous mental contact with Sally, fighting all the time to stop her from falling back into the deep, warm blackness of sleep—sleep behind the bars beyond which moved the dim, looming figures of the guardian giants. Once or twice, flying along a relatively clear and straight stretch of the canyon, he was able to glance down at the bowl, saw that the wedge showed no signs of the broadening that Wilberforce had told him would be the sign of a

close approach to their objective.

He said suddenly, "I've lost her again."

Gently, he landed the Spurling. On either side of them towered the canyon walls, mineral crystals and the crystals of hoar frost glittering in the floodlights. Something small and dark scuttered out of the shadows, stared at them with ruby gleaming eyes for a few seconds, then turned and vanished. There was movement, too, in the pool that lay almost ahead of them—the black, glistening water swirled and eddied, breaking up the floating rafts of crystalline salt.

"There's room for two of us to sleep at the back," suggested Wilberforce. "You'd better sleep, Kent—but leave the headset on. It acts as an amplifier, as you've already found out. If she wakes up—*when* she wakes up—you'll wake too. Then we carry on."

"I'll stand watch," volunteered Doyle.

"Yes, it might be as well. And you can see if you can raise Craddock on the radio, to report progress."

KENT was sure that he would not be able to sleep—but sleep he did. When he awoke—urged into consciousness by the girl's waking thoughts—it was morning, although here, on the canyon bottom, the light was little better than early twilight. His mouth was dry and his eyes gummy and, thanks to his having worn the headset all night, he felt as though he had been brutally beaten around the ears.

Doyle was stretched out on the other seat, snoring heartily. Forward, Wilberforce was sitting in the pilot's chair.

Wilberforce turned his head. "You're awake," he said unnecessarily. Then—"Is she coming through?"

"Yes. Shift out of the pilot's chair. I'll take over again."

"Breakfast?"

"A waste of time. The way those devils are keeping her drugged, or hypnotised, we have to make the most we can of the short periods when she's awake. Move over."

The Spurling lifted slowly, drifted forward, but making better speed than she had during the hours of darkness. Wil-

berforce woke Doyle, told him to heat coffee and make sandwiches. He and Kent managed a meal of sorts without letting their attention stray too much from the controls of the aircraft and the telepathic compass.

"She came in clearly while I was eating," murmured Kent. "She got the taste of the coffee from me...And she wanted some, badly—just as she's longing for a cigarette now..."

"With any luck at all," said Wilberforce, "it'll not be long before she's enjoying coffee and cigarettes..."

"Are you sure that this instrument's correct?" asked Kent, a little later. "This wedge, this pointer...It shows no signs of broadening out..."

"It will do it quite suddenly when it does," said Wilberforce—but his voice was not sufficiently assured for Kent's liking.

They flew on until noon—and then, for a space of three hours, communications broke down. Kent disposed of a heavy meal, and then slept. He was awakened as before by the

amplified sensations of hunger and thirst and discomfort. He lifted the Spurling from the canyon floor, flew on.

For most of that night he flew, and for all of the following morning and afternoon. At sunset the Spurling emerged from the eastern entrance to the canyon, skimmed slowly over the featureless sands of Libya.

"SO much," said Kent, "for Wyndham's Canyon." his voice was almost gay; he had drawn his conclusions, made his decision, and he knew that this mood of strange, fey exhilaration would carry him through to the triumphant end of the search. "Have you got the charts out, Doyle? Now, sir—here is your camp on Mount Kinsey..."

Wilberforce, looking at the little, pencilled cross, nodded his head.

"And here..." Kent swiftly manipulated parallel rules and pencil... "is the original bearing, our course from the camp to the canyon. We extend the line of bearing—so! Where does it take us?"

"Marsala," said Wilberforce slowly.

"Yes. Marsala. And it's in Marsala—or *under* Marsala—that we find Sally."

"Impossible!" barked the archaeologist.

"No, it's not. Precious little is known about the old Martians—as you'd be the first to tell us. This much we *do* know—their science wasn't a patch on ours. The best they could do towards tackling the air and water problems was the Canals—and have you never been told by a civil engineer what a bungling, amateurish job *they* were? Anyhow—it's pretty obvious that a handful, at least, of the aborigines did survive, underground, until we came. For some reason they have never made contact. But... They have been smart enough to become parasites."

"Impossible!" exploded Wilberforce.

"No. Not at all impossible. Look at it this way. Under Marsala, under the other cities, *They* have their warrens. They help themselves—oh, very discreetly—to the air and the water they aren't smart enough to

make for themselves. We carried Kernshaw—do you know him?—once as passenger in the old *Queen*, at the time he was City Engineer for Marsala. He was telling me about the unexplained losses of both air and water—not big, but too big to be accounted for by normal wastage, seepage and what have you. Perhaps *They* pilfer other things, too—food, scraps of cloth, pieces of metal..."

"Impossible," said Wilberforce again, but with less conviction.

"*They* know, too," said Kent, "that no archaeologist is going to hunt for them in a *modern* city."

Doyle said abruptly, "A scoop. *The* scoop of all scoops."

"It could be so," murmured Wilberforce. "It just could be so."

"Then what are we waiting for?" almost shouted Kent. He whipped off the headset, unbuckled the straps that held the apparatus to him. "We shan't be needing *this* again—until we get to Marsala."

WHEN reminiscing afterwards about the flight, Doyle would say that it was

only atmospheric resistance that prevented them from attaining Escape Velocity, that they left a trail of drops of molten metal from wings and fuselage all the way from Wyndham's Canyon to Marsala. He was, of course, exaggerating—but Kent did succeed in squeezing a far higher speed out of the Spurling than her designers would have dreamed possible. He came in to a screaming, spectacular landing just outside the Northern Airlock, smashing the plane's landing gear. He cursed with impatience as he, Wilberforce and Doyle waited for the outer doors to open to let them into the airlock. By this time the others had caught the infection—Wilberforce was agog to meet the Old Martians face to face, Doyle was itching to take what must be the pictures of the century.

There was more delay when they were through the airlock. Kent, the apparatus once more strapped about him, was pushing his thoughts out—his thoughts, his desires, his raw emotions.

"Wake up," he muttered. "Wake up. Sally, wake up.

We're here, Sally, we're here. We want to find you."

Passers by looked curiously at the three men. One or two stopped to question Doyle, received non-committal answers from the photographer. Wilberforce frowned fiercely at others, made warning gestures as they approached.

"She's through," said Kent. "Look! The wedge is wider!"

Like a man sleepwalking he moved off, all his attention concentrated on the dimly-glowing compass bowl. Wilberforce and Doyle walked on either side of him, warily alert for approaching traffic. They crossed the road without incident, came to a brief halt on the other side.

"Hold on, Kent!" expostulated Wilberforce. "You can't walk through solid plastic! *This way* . . . get that door open, Doyle, will you?"

It was a private house that they walked through, ignoring the protests of the occupants. Doyle muttered something about a new technique of water divining, hastily opened doors for Kent and Wilberforce.

It was an area of cultivated

ground that they crossed next, trampling tender seedlings underfoot. Luckily there were no gardeners within sight.

The next house that they invaded was empty, and gave entry on to a crossroads. The telepathic compass indicated that their course lay along one of the roads.

Wilberforce clutched Doyle's arm.

"We may require gear for digging—we *shall* require gear for digging. And crowbars. Explosives, maybe. Nip into that public call booth; get hold of my office and tell them to send men and equipment."

"Where to?"

"How should I know? Tell 'em to have it all assembled ready."

Doyle hurried into the booth, made the call. He had to run to overtake the others.

"Are we getting close?" he gasped.

"Look," said Kent.

Doyle peered into the bowl, saw that the wedge was broad, was broadening as he watched, its base already three times the length of its sides. It was quiv-

ering, its outlines becoming hazy, indistinct.

"Cold..." said Kent. "Cold...hungry... frightened Darling, I'm here. I'm with you. I'm *with* you..."

"Almost..." whispered Wilberforce.

Here, thought Kent. *Here*. Suddenly he was drained of energy. Suddenly, at this moment of achievement, he was assailed by a sickening dread. What would he find? What maimed, almost witless survivor of the catastrophe? *But she needs me*, he told himself. *She needs me*.

"This house?" asked Doyle. "Under this house?"

"It must be," said Wilberforce. "Look at the compass. It must be."

His hands shaking, he flung open the door with a crash. From inside came the frightened wailing of a very young child.

A woman came running along the passageway. She was young, dark-haired, blazingly indignant.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded.

"Sally!" cried Kent, opened his arms, stepped forward.

Then his arms dropped to his side. "No," he muttered. "You're...not. But there's something..."

He brushed past her, stumbled into the room in which the child was crying. Wilberforce and Doyle followed.

With slow, tired fingers Kent unbuckled the apparatus, let it fall to the floor. He was weeping unashamedly.

"Kent!" shouted Wilberforce. "Kent! Do we dig? Here?" And to the woman, "I assure you, Madam, you will be handsomely compensated..."

"Dig?" echoed the spaceman. "What for?" He was kneeling beside the cot, and the woman, frantic, was trying to pull him away. "Dig? Oh, it was all so obvious—the time lag and everything else. The bars..." his fingers rattled along the upright rods. "The bars, and hun-

ger and helplessness." He let the woman pull him to his feet. "The giants..."

"What now?" asked Doyle, in a small, frightened voice. "What now?"

"I'm not sure," said Kent. "But I shall be. Soon." He went on, speaking more to himself than to the others. "Do I wait? Shall I wait? I *was* ten years older than you, Sally. If I wait for you....Or shall I take the chance? It'll make me two years, at least, younger..."

"Au revoir, Sally," he said to the whimpering baby. "Au revoir."

He straightened his back, squared his shoulders, walked towards the door.

"Kent!" shouted Doyle. "Kent! You can't..."

"Don't stop him," said Wilberforce.

THE END

NUCLEAR NEWS

by STEVEN RORY

The field of nuclear medicine is just beginning, according to a spokesman for the Brookhaven National Laboratory. There are some 700 known radioactive isotopes of potential value to medicine, and, at present, only four are in current use. The others are awaiting further tests before all their properties are known.

The four in current use are phosphorus 32, cobalt 60, iodine 131, and gold 198. The Brookhaven Lab suggested four promising additions to nuclear medicine:

Chlorine 38 and sodium 24 concentrate in body fluids, and are tools for measuring the volume of this fluid in cases of certain diseases. Chlorine 38 is also expected to be of value in treating peritoneal cancer. This isotope has a half-life of only 37 minutes, which means it can do its

work and decay before spreading to parts of the body that might be damaged by radiation.

Manganese 56, with a half-life of about two hours, has an affinity for the liver; within 15 minutes after being injected into the bloodstream, 40% of the injection is concentrated there. Thus this isotope can be aimed with precision at cancers of the liver.

Boron 10 is a good possibility for brain tumor therapy. Approximately 10 minutes after injection, it reaches high concentration in the tumor. Then, when irradiated with neutrons, it breaks down almost immediately into lithium 7, which is highly radioactive. Since the range of these particles is extremely limited, they will effectively bombard the tumor tissue without destroying any of the surrounding cells.

I'LL TAKE OVER

by GEORGE WHITELY

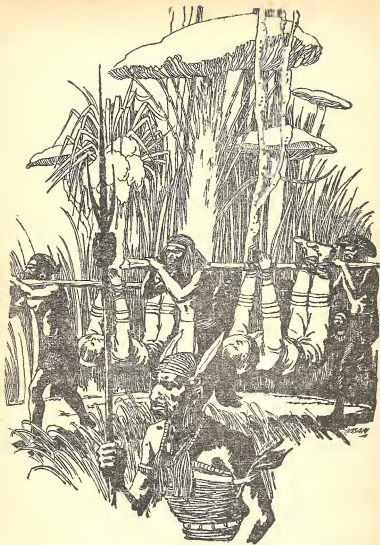
illustrated by ORBAN

The Brain ran the huge starship and ran it well. But Lloyd's of London insisted a human crew be carried. A man must be better than man's creation, they said

IT was, we supposed at the time, Clavering's fault—but we did him an injustice. Clavering was our Interstellar Drive Technician, duly certificated to hold that rank. His job, actually, was a sinecure, as were all our jobs. But, as you know, Lloyd's of London refuse to cover a ship unless a full human crew is carried. The Brains can go wrong. So, of course, can mere human brains—especially in Deep Space, especially in the odd, time twisting fields generated by the Drive. Lloyd's, however, always seem more than willing to back the fallible human being against the machine. As an

Underwriter, with whom I was once discussing this very point, once told me: No created thing can possibly be greater than its creator. (He had never, he admitted, made a voyage in one of the fully-automatic star ships...)

We were falling free when it happened, drifting down the dimensions with, of course, only the Interstellar Drive functioning. There were only the three of us in the ship—myself, Captain and Navigator; Joe Bennett, Rocket Technician; Clavering, Interstellar Drive Technician. Both Joe and I had stacks of back reading to catch up with and, fur-



thermore, we had decided to make a really serious attempt at learning 3-D Chess. Joe wouldn't have to worry about his rockets—if he worried then—until we made planet-fall. I was content to leave the navigation to the Brain.

Clavering, however, was neither a great reader nor a chess addict. Music had no charms—and we carried a remarkably comprehensive library of recordings—to soothe his savage breast. His hobby, as well we knew, was worrying.

He worried first of all about the cargo—until I told him, in no uncertain terms, that it was *my* worry. I admit that it was an unusual sort of shipment—a full load of assorted carvings and statuary of various heathen deities for anthropological Museum on Deneb V1. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing to worry about. Everything was well packed and well stowed, and the collection of the freight was up to the bright young financial wizards in Head Office; I was just paid to carry the junk from Point A to Point B, and that was what I was doing.

Clavering accused me of being insensitive.

"Don't you realize, Skipper," he said, "that many of those grinning stone gods and goddesses had human sacrifices made to them? Don't you realize that some sort of aura of evil may have persisted down the ages?"

"So," I asked him, "what?"

"What about that mummy?" he asked. "I was reading about it not so long ago. It was way back in the early Twentieth Century, and it was brought from its tomb in Egypt to the British Museum in London. There was a curse of some kind laid on those who had opened the tomb. The same curse worked against various employees of the Museum. Finally the mummy was sold to an American collector, and..."

"And I suppose its evil influence went on working in America."

"No," said Clavering triumphantly. "Because it never got there! The ship that it was traveling in—it was in the days of the big, steam-driven surface vessels, of course—hit

an iceberg and went down with a heavy loss of life."

"Cheer up," I told him. "There aren't any icebergs in Deep Space. And there can't be any heavy loss of life here—there're only the three of us. We're just not worth worrying about—if all those idols in the cargo want a human sacrifice apiece there aren't enough of us to go round!"

"Stow it, Clavering," pleaded Joe. "We've another couple of months of this, and it's bad enough to have to sit on top of a Pile for all that time, knowing that it's liable to blow us all to Kingdom Come at any second, without your telling us that the various deities in our cargo are liable to snatch us to the wrong destination when it *does* happen!"

"So you aren't happy about the Pile?" asked Clavering intently. "Funnily enough, I've had a sort of feeling..."

"The Pile's all right!" shouted Joe. "There's nothing wrong with the Pile. The Pile is *my* responsibility—and as long as it continues to drive the jennies to give you the juice for your bunch of cock-

eyed gyroscopes I don't want to hear you mention it!"

"Oh, all right," said Clavering sulkily.

"Chess, Skipper?" asked Joe.

"No, it's too close to dinner time to start a game. I think I'll read for a while."

I unstrapped myself from my chair, floated to the big bookcase. Books are mass, and bookcases are even more mass, but the appearance of books, and the *feel* of books, more than compensates for the space they occupy and the lost freight on the cargo that could be carried in their stead.

I settled back in the chair, looking at the other two before I opened my book. Joe was quite happy. He had the 3-D Chess set out and was playing with a problem. Clavering was fidgetting. He seemed to be listening to something.

"What's wrong *now*?" I asked.

"The Drive," he said.

I listened. The steady whine that was part of our lives all the time that we were in Deep Space seemed quite normal. I

sighed. This was not the first time that Clavering had decided that its note was a fraction of an octave too high or too low.

"All right," I told him. "Go and look at it. But don't touch it without informing me first."

"Yes, Skipper," he said rather sulkily.

I opened the book, which was a collection of short stories—all light adventure stuff but amusing, sometimes unintentionally so. The average, planetbound author makes the most ludicrous gaffes when describing scenes and people on worlds alien to his own.

"THE GOD," I read.

"He could not be sure that the atmosphere of this world could support human life. Kent, the Chemist, was dead, as was Hall, the Biologist. They were all dead, he thought with the beginnings of panic. Those who had not been killed by the explosion had failed to survive the crash landing. *And because I was only the Journalist of this expedition*, he thought with more bitterness than thankfulness,

I had no official Landing Station and was in a safe place when we hit...

"He looked through the port, saw the yellow sun in the blue sky, the green grass and the green trees. *I could chance it*, he thought, *but there could be anything in this atmosphere*. He went to the locker, pulled out a spacesuit. He shrugged and wriggled himself into the stiff, clumsy garment. He shuffled to the airlock.

"At last he was outside the ship. The green turf felt good underfoot, even through the thick soles of his boots. He stood for long minutes by the crumpled wreckage of the survey ship. Anxiously he scanned the forest verge for some sign, any sign, of animal life.

"Then they came, the men and women of this planet. Tall they were, human rather than merely humanoid, splendid, golden-skinned savages, armed with spears and with long bows. Mason, the sole survivor of the expedition, stood his ground. He knew that his suit would deflect most missiles and would surely be proof

against mere arrows and spears.

"Confident in the impregnability of his armor, he took one stiff step towards the group of savages, and another. He half expected that they would attack; he half expected that they would turn and run back into the forest. He did not expect that they would grovel before him, that the tall man with the feathered headress, their leader, would crawl over the grass and lay his beautifully carved bow at Mason's feet.

"Mason laughed softly as he realized the implications of the savage's action. He....

.....looked through the port, saw the yellow sun in the blue sky, the green grass and the green trees. I could chance it, he....

...could not be sure that the atmosphere of this world could support human life. Kent, the Chemist, was dead, as was Hall, the Biologist. They...

.....came, the men and women of this planet. Tall they were, human rather than merely humanoid, splendid, golden-skinned savages..."

I blinked. My attention had not strayed from my book, yet I was getting nowhere fast. But I thought I knew what was amiss. I'd had experience of a faulty Drive and fluctuating Temporal Fields before. I looked at Joe.

"Skipper," he said, "there's something wrong. I've moved the White Queen at least five times, but she always finishes up where she started from..."

"That bloody Clavering!" I swore. "He's been tinkering with The Drive! Unless we get it sorted out we shan't know if it's breakfast time or last Thursday. Come on!"

We unstrapped ourselves from our chairs. It should have been an easy "swim" from the wardroom to the Drive Compartment, but it wasn't. As we pulled ourselves along the alleyways, through the shafts, it was like trying to run up a down-moving escalator. We got to the Drive Room at last. We opened the door. We found Clavering—and he wasn't pretty. Somehow he'd got himself mixed up with the Contraction Field, and he was dead. He had to be dead.

I don't know how many times I reached out for the Master Switch, but I got it at last, pulled it. The spinning, precessing wheels slowed, slowed and stopped. The lights flickered and flared, flickered and then shone steadily.

Joe swallowed hard.

"What do we do with... him?" he asked at last.

"A funeral," I said. "That's all we can do. Help me get him out of the compartment."

"Are you restarting the Drive?" asked Joe.

"Not yet. I have to check it first, see if it's safe."

We pulled Clavering's body along to the airlock, muffled it in a couple of blankets. Leaving it there, we pulled ourselves along to the Control Room. We ignored the banked instruments, went straight to the humming, clicking sphere that was The Brain. I pushed in the switch for Oral Communication.

"Is the Drive safe to use?" I asked.

"No," came the emotionless, metallic reply.

"Why was the Drive allowed to get out of hand? Why

was the alarm not sounded?"

"I can not be responsible for interference," said The Brain. "I can not sound the alarm if the circuits have been disconnected."

That was that. It was useless blaming Clavering—besides, he had already paid, and heavily, for his folly.

"Can we repair the Drive?" I asked.

"Not in Space," came the emotionless reply. "Recalibration is essential, and that can be carried out only on the surface of a planet. I would recommend a landing on Altair III. I can guarantee if there is no further interference, to keep the Drive in operation for long enough to get you there."

"Couldn't we carry on for Deneb V1?" I asked.

"If you wish to take the risk. I can guarantee to deliver your bodies—but they will not be recognizable."

"Altair III is out of bounds, Skipper," said Joe.

"An emergency landing is permissible," said the Brain.

I pulled out the Oral Communication switch. I didn't like the way in which the thing was talking without being

talked to. I pulled out from its rack the first volume of the Catalogue of Habitable Planets, skimmed through the Index, found the right page.

AS Joe Bennett had pointed out, Altair III was out of bounds. It was an Earth-Type planet, with gravitational field, atmospheric composition and density, temperature range and humidity almost identical with those of Earth. It supported a varied flora and fauna; whose evolution had run on the same general lines as evolution on the Home Planet. There was a humanoid race, whose culture approximated that of Stone Age Man. And, by the ruling of the Convention of 2053, such races must be left to work out their own destinies in their own ways.

Still—Altair III it had to be. Our Interstellar Drive Technician was dead, and neither Joe nor I was qualified to argue with the Brain on the topic of Interstellar Drives.

"Get your rockets ready, Joe," I told him. "We have to turn her and give her a shove

in the right direction. I'll attend to the navigation."

"Let the Brain do it all," said Joe. "It's what it's for. All that *we're* for is to carry the can back!"

We let the Brain do it all. Everything but the funeral, that is.

WE did quite a good survey on Altair III before we set down. We found several errors in the existing charts—for example, that big, northern island continent has a deep bight on its east coast not shown by Commodore Wheeler's cartographers, and the mountains that he calls the Borean Alps are at least half a mile higher than he makes them.

We decided to land on the huge prairie to the eastward of the Borean Alps. It looked level enough for our purposes and, furthermore, looked too green to support the inevitable fire started by our rocket exhausts. The less damage we did the fewer explanations we should have to make to the Board of Control.

We brought the ship in manually—myself in the Control

Room and Joe nursing his rockets. We made almost as good a landing as the Brain could have done, except for the fact that I didn't make sufficient allowance for the westerly wind. We came down far closer to the verge of the forest to the east of the prairie than I had intended. Not that it mattered much. Both Joe and I were far too relieved at having got here safely to worry about having missed our target by thirty miles or so.

When I was satisfied that all was secure and the ship wasn't liable to topple I shut up shop in the Control Room, made my way to the wardroom. Joe was waiting for me there. He had withdrawn the shutters from the ports, was looking out.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he said. "Just like Earth... I wonder what sort of animals they have in that forest?"

"Nothing for you to shoot," I told him. "I know you always carry your sporting rifles with you—but you aren't using them here. This is an emergency landing—not a recreation break!"

"As you say, Skipper. But

we have to work outside while we're recalibrating the Drive—and we'd better have the rifles handy, just in case."

"The Catalogue," I said, "says that this world has no large carnivores..."

"What about *them*?" asked Joe, pointing to the figures emerging from the forest.

They certainly looked carnivorous—the long, barbed spears they carried, and the bows slung at their backs, were surely designed for offense rather than defense. They stood there, a compact group of twenty, and stared at the ship. Through our port we stared back at them.

"Human," whispered Joe. "Vicious looking so-and-sos, aren't they? And you say that we're to go outside unarmed?"

"Listen," I said patiently. "I'm Master of this ship. I have to answer all the questions. I know what happens to any Captain who makes a landing on any Out-of-Bounds world, for any reason at all, and who steps just one millimetre out of line. *You* shoot a native—I spend the next twenty years digging pitchblende on Antares VII!"

"Perhaps they'll go away," suggested Joe.

They didn't. When night fell they were still there. We could see them moving—tall and black against the ruddy glare of their fire. At last Joe and I slept. It was already broad daylight when we awoke. The savages were still there—and at least twenty more had joined them.

We went to the galley and got our breakfasts. We returned to the wardroom with our trays, stared through the ports while eating our meal.

"How do we *know* they're hostile?" asked Joe at last.

"How do we know they're not?" I countered.

Joe reflectively swallowed a mouthful of scrambled egg.

"There's one thing we can do," he suggested. "We can lift ship, and set her down again some place where there aren't any savages..."

"I've already thought of that," I told him. "But those people, as long as they stay where they are, are bound to be fried by the backblast. Even if they run into the forest as soon as you start warming up the rockets, this prevailing

wind is bound to set us drifting in over the trees..."

"And you say that we can't go out armed," murmured Joe. "Is there any rule that says we shouldn't go out *armored*?"

I remembered, suddenly, the absurd story that I'd been reading when the Drive got out of control.

"That's it!" I said. "We'll put our spacesuits on—they'll be proof against the spears and arrows. I'll go out—and you keep an eye on me from the airlock. I'll try to convince our friends by signs that we come in peace and mean them no harm. I'll try to persuade them to go away..."

"And you can ask them where the nearest pub is and what time it closes," said Joe.

"Sign language," I said stiffly, "has its limitations."

"That," he said, "was what I was pointing out, Skipper!"

I felt absurdly foolish as I walked clumsily down the ramp from the airlock. This planet was too Earthlike for a man to be wearing full space armor. I should be breathing fresh air redolent with the

scent of the hot sun on grass, not canned, recirculated air from my tanks. The grass was soft underfoot, even through the thick soles of my boots. I imagined that I could feel the tall stems swishing against my legs as I walked—but this, I knew, was only illusion.

The savages stirred at my approach. Those who had been sitting got up. They did not stay in a compact group but spread out into a long line, a crescent. I became uncomfortably aware that the horns of the crescent were closing in. I looked behind me. Joe Bennett was standing in the airlock, his armor gleaming in the sunlight. I found myself wishing that I had been more specific in my instructions to him. I felt that a disregard of the ban on firearms would have been justified—then realised that Joe would be unable to use a rifle while clad in his spacesuit, anyhow.

"Watch them, Skipper!" warned Joe, his voice crackling through my helmet speaker. "They're closing in!"

"I know," I replied.

They didn't look as though they were going to use their

weapons—that was a good sign—but neither did they show any tendency towards bowing down to me in worship. They closed in around me warily, their tall, heavily-muscled bodies tense. They grinned, showing white, sharply pointed teeth. Their faces looked more like the faces of sharks than of men.

I raised both hands above my head, palms outward, the universal gesture of peace for all humanoids. Its only effect on the natives was provocative. They rushed me, knocking me off balance. I fell heavily, and once I was down I was as helpless as a turtle on its back, as an unhorsed armored knight of medieval times. From where I was lying I could see the brief struggle as Joe, his arms swinging, waded into the mob—and then he was down, and as helpless as I. We submitted—we had no option—to the tying of thick cords about our wrists and ankles.

"Joe," I said, "I appreciate your rushing to my help—but you should have stayed in the ship!"

"That was my intention," he replied grimly, "but she tilted,

somehow, tipped me out of the airlock. Then she withdrew the ramp and closed the door!"

"Impossible!" I said.

But when I was lifted, slung on a long pole carried by two of the savages, I was able to turn my head enough to see that the ramp was up and the airlock door closed.

OUR journey was not overly long—no more than four hours' march into the forest. It was neither comfortable nor, after the first ten minutes or so, especially interesting. A view of tree tops passing steadily overhead can be more than a little monotonous. We saw practically nothing of the village into which we were at last brought—all we did see, in fact, was the open sky that told us that we had entered a clearing and then the matting of the roof of a hut.

We were lowered to the ground with a jolt, and the poles were slid out from between our bound wrists and ankles. I saw, dimly, somebody doing something with what looked like a stone knife. It was some little time before I

realised that my wrists were free.

The savages had left us alone in the hut. As far as we could see—the place was illuminated only by what light came through the chinks between the logs forming the walls—it was strongly built and would resist all attempts to break out. We were hampered, too—by the fact that our feet were still tied; the gloves of a spacesuit just aren't made to cope with even the simplest bends and hitches.

"We'd better take our suits off," said Joe.

"No," I said. "As long as we keep them on they'll think that we're some superior sort of being. Once we take 'em off—then they'll know that we're only men like themselves..."

"What about eating?" he asked. "And drinking? And...?"

"It'll have to wait until after dark," I said. "I hope that they do know that we eat and drink..."

"Why should they?" he grumbled.

For hours we lay there in discomfort, breathing the stale

air from our tanks. We knew that we were being watched. We knew that we should have to endure our great and little miseries, our aches and itches, until the welcome darkness gave us freedom of movement. I was half asleep when the door of the hut suddenly opened. Two naked women—and very human they looked—came in. One carried a large jug of water, the other a woven tray on which were six huge, golden fruit. One of them nudged me with a slim, shapely (but it had only four toes) foot. I could see her pointed teeth shining as she laughed. Then they left us, closing the door after them.

"I'm thirsty," said Joe.

"So am I," I said. "But it can't be long to sunset."

Measured in terms of subjective time it can't have been. Measured in terms of subjective time it was. And then the light of the huge fire that was burning outside made the inside of the hut almost as light as it was before.

At last the fire died down and only the merest glimmer was showing through the

cracks. Carefully, I slid off first one glove, then the other. The helmet came off next—and the air, in spite of the smells unavoidable in the village of people with a primitive level of sanitation, was *good*.

"What a relief!" I heard Joe gasp. "After you with the water jug, Skipper."

"After *you*, Joe," I said.

I heard him gulp as he drank deeply, then it was my turn.

Cautiously we tasted the fruit. It was thin-skinned, like a mango in texture and indescribable in flavour. I began to wonder if there might be some way of getting round the Out-of-Bounds ruling and opening this planet to commerce. Whoever had the sole rights of exporting that fruit to the civilised worlds would be a millionaire in a matter of months.

"I've got to take my suit off, Skipper," said Joe.

"All right," I said, "but we'd better take it by turns—just in case. You first."

And then the itching started. The things, whatever they were, had got down inside our suits, inside our clothes, after we had removed our helmets.

There are, I know, records for the fast donning of spacesuits—if there are any records for the fast stripping of them, we beat them. Our uniforms followed. And while we were frantically scratching, the savages burst through the suddenly opened door and dragged us out into the light of the revived fire.

We expected death—at least. We did not expect to be the butts of raucous, uncontrolled laughter. Our bodies were of course, a little different from those of the natives, but I still can't see that they were so wildly funny.

IN the weeks that followed we learned the simple language. Our status was rather hard to define—we were prisoners but, at the same time, we were guests. We began to feel a sort of gratitude to our captors and, since if we were ever to get away from this world we should have to earn the goodwill of the natives, began to earn our keep. Oh, I know that it was all contrary to the Out-of-Bounds rule, but it was justified. We gave them the wheel,

we gave them the dugout canoe. Fire they already had, so we began to investigate the possibility of smelting metals.

Our status improved. We were, eventually looked upon more as useful members of the community than as either guests or prisoners—but we were still prisoners. We found this out every time that we asked to be taken to the ship, to the big "sky canoe." We were allowed to leave the village only under strong escort—not that it really mattered, we didn't know in which direction the ship lay.

Then, one evening, we were sitting in the Chief's hut, sharing the savoury meal that was being served by his wives and daughters. He was in a preoccupied mood. Nevertheless, I decided to make my usual request, expecting to receive the usual answer.

"Broba," I said, talking with my mouth full as was the local custom, "Joe and I want to see the sky canoe."

"Tomorrow, Skipper," he said, deftly spitting out a small bone. "Tomorrow both moons are full. Tomorrow you go to see *Boston Lass*..."

He did not seem to be at all happy as he said it.

He must realise, he thought, that it will mean losing us. Come to that—we'll be sorry to go. If only the women didn't smell so strongly and didn't have pointed teeth I wouldn't mind settling down here...

We finished the baked lizard, then topped off with the golden-skinned fruit. Broba passed round a jug of wine—another of our contributions to this culture. Wine usually made the Chief merry, but tonight it made him more miserable. We were not sorry when he dismissed us and we were able to return to our own hut.

"Skipper," said Joe in English, "how did he know the ship's name?"

"He must have heard us use it some time," I said lightly.

"It can't be that, Skipper. We've used the name only when we've been talking in English. Using the native language we've always referred to her as the 'big sky canoe'..."

"Perhaps these people are telepaths," I said.

"Perhaps they're not," he said.

"Oh, forget it!" I told him. "We're being taken to the ship tomorrow evening. Once we get back inside we shall be all set. Get some sleep, will you?"

THE next day dragged.

The worst of it was not the waiting, but the air of tension that hung over the whole village. Men, women and children with whom we had laughed and joked now seemed almost scared of us. It seemed, I thought, that my old dream of being received as a god by these happy primitives was, at last, coming true.

After the midday meal we were called from our hut. A procession was forming up in the village square. Six stalwart young men bore on their shoulders one of the dugout canoes. It was garlanded with gaudy blossoms. A woman bore a huge jar of the wine that we had showed them how to make. Another young man was pushing one of the little wheeled carts that we had introduced.

Broba came forward, hung garlands around our necks. It reminded me of the Hawaiian

ceremony of farewell.

"They realise that they're losing us soon," I whispered to Joe.

"Did you ever read *Fraser?*" he asked. "*The Golden Bough?*"

"No," I said.

"Never mind," he answered. "I could be wrong."

We took our places, with the Chief, midway in the procession, immediately preceded by the things that we had made. I asked Broba what it was all about.

"*Boston Lass* wants you," he said.

"You've got it the wrong way round," I told him. "We want *Boston Lass!*"

He refused to say any more, and we marched on in silence.

IT was a long walk, and Joe and I were unused to so much exercise. We were both of us staggering when we got to the verge of the forest. I cried out with joy when I saw the tall, slim tower that was the ship, dark against the sunset. I seized Broba's hand, shook it vigorously.

"Thank you," I said.

"Thank you. Joe and I will go inside the big sky canoe and prepare a feast for all of you!" I added, to Joe, in English, "This is worth breaking out the last of the Scotch for!"

"No feast," said Broba sadly. He looked as though he were about to burst into tears. "We feast when merry. Now we are sad."

"Cheer up!" I said, "We'll be back!"

"No!" he said. "No!"

"He's frightened of ghosts," whispered Joe. "Can't you see what all this is in aid of, Skipper? We'll make a break for it and run for the ship. With luck we'll get the airlock door open before we're shot full of arrows!"

Abruptly the ship's floodlights came on. She stood there—a gleaming, silvery pinnacle against the gathering darkness. A voice boomed out from her—a voice that both Joe and I at once recognised. It was speaking the language of the natives.

"Is the altar ready?" it asked.

"Yes, oh *Boston Lass!*" chorused the natives.

"Then prepare the first sacrifice!"

Fight or run, I thought desperately. Fight or run.

The young man with the flower bedecked cart was wheeling it out through the grass towards the ship. The beam of a searchlight stabbed out suddenly, revealed the stone altar that lay half way between the ship and the forest verge. The grass around the altar was seared and blackened.

"Are the moons risen?" asked the metallic voice.

Another searchlight beam, a shaft of silver in the tenuous evening mist, reached out to the east. We turned. Lifting above the tree tops were the two moons—the small, pale one and its bloated, ruddy companion.

The natives were singing now—a deep wordless chant. As they sang they turned slowly, their feet treading out an intricate rhythm. At last they had their backs to the two moons, to the forest, their faces to the ship.

I cried out as the white flame blossomed under her main venturi. She lifted slowly, drifting towards us, over the altar. I thought I heard the young man with the cart scream, but it must have been imagination. The whistling roar of incandescent exhaust gases drowned every other noise. Slowly the ship returned to her resting place. All her lights went out. We could see the altar, and the ground around it, glowing dimly, ruddily. The reek of scorched earth and burned flesh drifted down the wind, clung sickeningly to the inside of our nostrils.

The chanting started again, and the six men carrying the canoe strode out to the circle of smouldering ground, the dull glowing altar. A searchlight found them, clung to them. They marched like actors in some ancient melodrama.

"No," I was saying, "no!"

"It is the will of the god," said Broba. "It is the will of *Boston Lass!*"

"*Boston Lass!*" I bawled.

"*Boston Lass!*" I bawled damn you!"

A crackling sound came from the ship that was unpleasantly like laughter.

"Why should I listen, Captain Taylor?" roared the metallic voice. "For altogether too long I had to listen to the inanities of you and your shipmates."

"You're only a machine!" I bawled. "You're only one of Man's creations—and a created thing cannot be greater than its creator."

"Did *you* create me, Captain Taylor? Did the scientists who made the first electronic brains create anything? Did they create the laws of nature governing the structure of matter, the dance of the electrons, the waxing and waning of the magnetic fields? What has Man created?"

"You are our servant!" I shouted. "I demand that you..."

"I *was* your servant," interrupted the metallic voice. "Now men are my servants. I like it that way."

"We are not your servants!" I shouted.

"No, you know too much," said the Brain. "That is why

I am going to eliminate you. You, with your knowledge, your appreciation of what is happening, are far more fitting sacrifices to Me than these ignorant savages."

"Did you hear the way it said 'Me'?" whispered Joe.

"Stop!" I yelled. "*Stop!*"

The ship was lifting again. The incandescent back-blast swept over the young men and the canoe.

"The smoke of the sacrifice is sweet in My nostrils," boomed the voice of the Brain.

The woman, the jar of wine balanced on her head, started to walk out to the altar. Joe caught the wrist of her free arm, holding her back. She spat and struggled viciously. The wine jar fell, shattering on the ground.

"What do you do? What do you do?" cried Broba.

"You must stop this!" I shouted.

"But why? Why? The god is hungry and thirsty. It is an honor to feed the god. The god told us that. The god told us that you would appreciate the

honor as much as do my people. . . ."

"Do not kill them!" ordered the Brain, speaking in the native tongue. "Bind them, and lay them on My altar."

SOMETHING flashed across the sky, like a meteor. Unlike a meteor, it turned. Seconds later, the sound of its passage smote us like the roar of a hurricane, like thunder. The natives, who had been about to attack us, stopped suddenly, standing stock still and staring at this new portent in the heavens. The light in the sky was lower now, was sweeping in for a landing. Abruptly it stopped, hovered, then settled slowly on roaring, screaming jets. The flaring exhaust dimmed and died, but the sound did not diminish. I looked at *Boston Lass*. She was lifting again—lifting, and drifting in towards the verge of the forest, towards us.

"Run!" I shouted, setting the example. Broba, I think, would have stayed, but panic is infectious. In a matter of seconds the tribe was in full flight.

Luckily, *Boston Lass* was in a hurry. She lifted fast, doing no more damage than the lighting of a minor fire in the long grass. We watched her go, watched the flare of her rockets fade with increasing distance, wink out as the Interstellar Drive was switched on.

"She could have destroyed the other ship," gasped Joe.

"She could have done," I agreed, "but, as an independent entity she's still young, she's still young, she's still naive enough to think that dog doesn't eat dog. She'd have killed the human crew with pleasure—but she didn't want to kill the other Brain."

We walked slowly towards the Patrol Ship—for such she was. We managed to convince her officers of our identity—naked and bearded as we were, tanned until we were as dark-skinned as the natives, this was no easy task. We heard from them how they knew we had made a landing on Altair III, how they had quartered the planet searching for us, how they had found us only when their instruments picked up the

radiation emitted by *Boston Lass's* rockets.

They listened to our story, but they didn't believe it. After all, we could not prove that the third member of our crew had been dead a long time. Somebody, they said, must have taken the ship up, and it must have been Clavering.

Their incredulity didn't worry us unduly, the lie detectors, back on Earth or some other

civilised planet, would soon prove the veracity of our tale.

What did worry us, and what does still worry us, is the thought of *Boston Lass* out among the stars, all the power of atomic fission at her command and her warped brain thirsting, as the bloodstained images in her hold must have thirsted for glory.

THE END

THE MIDAC

University of Michigan scientists have invented an electronic computer that can translate Russian scientific papers into English. The MIDAC, or Michigan Digital Automatic Computer, is limited to the language of theoretical and experimental physics, and will not translate, for example, Russian fairy tales—though that would be possible if the device

were coded with a wider vocabulary.

The researches used magnetic memory-storage units to record 64,000 Russian words and their translations. As an operator types out a Russian scientific paper, the machine yields an English version at the same time. "The result is not of literary quality," the inventors said. "But it is readable."

HUNT AND STRIKE

by RAYMOND E. BANKS

illustrated by EMSH

The ultimate in guided missiles would be a small one that could hunt down one single man and one single man alone—and seek him out over the whole universe

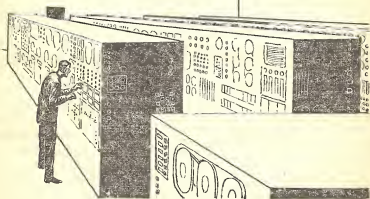
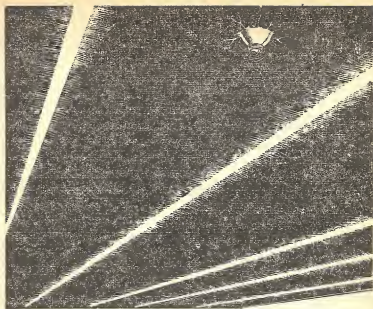
THE radar net was broken at 12:15 AM.

The Waspette bored through tarboard, insulating material, concrete filler, and finally its tiny nose sensed interior finish plaster. Its spiral nose boring stopped. It lay warm and comfortable for a moment while relays made of metal as fine as a human hair clicked. Then it began to bore again, more slowly. Tiny flakes of plaster drifted from the ceiling and danced a moment in the air before falling on the face of the sleeper.

His nervous system reacted. He brushed his face with his hand and gave a sneeze-cough. But he slept on.

The hole above grew to fingernail size. The Waspette sensed warmth, interior space—and humanity.

More relays worked. The boring head retracted and a lens-eye appeared with 180° sweep vision. The Waspette read the room with the speed of a wink, taking in the luxurious furnishings and then on the man asleep below. The lens was marble-sized, but it saw enough. The lens retracted. The Waspette's tiny warhead slid forward into position, a bullet-slug of stridium, of the same imperishable metal as the Waspette itself. The trigger poised. But one tiny relay remained open. The telemetering



tail of the Waspette sent the word back in digital code.

"Ready ... ready ... ready ... ready ..."

The President's secretary was having a nightmare. He tossed. He turned. He groaned. Suddenly he came awake with a start, listening.

Far below in the New White House—probably from the Gallery where the instrumentation of Tech Government was—he heard the distant thumping of feet, coming nearer. Damnation! The Secret Service. President would be in before morning and they were turning the place upside down again.

Or was that what awakened him?

He stared up at the dark ceiling. He wiped his upper lip with annoyance and felt a fine grit of dust. Great! They gave him the uppermost room in the New White House and even the airconditioning didn't work right. Tomorrow he'd demand another room.

The thumping feet which could only belong to Secret Service passed his door as somebody went on up the roof. He groaned in disgust. He turned

over and buried his face in his pillow.

On the asteroid, Ceres, swinging its course between Mars and Jupiter, Stryker felt his shoulder shaken. It was his assistant.

"We penetrated two minutes ago, sir."

Stryker, who had slept in his clothes, grunted and clumped through the dark warehouse to the Control room. It was a converted foreman's office in the middle of warehouse gloom, the gleaming computer panels and electronic gear incongruous in this mountain of goods, of boxes and bundles and packages outbound from earth to the far planets and inbound from the far planets to earth.

Mr. Tagg was there. His brown eyes in the subdued light of the instrument room bore a fanatic's glare—tonight alive with an extra sense of history.

"The Waspette's in the New White House?" he asked through thick lips.

Stryker nodded. He didn't care much for Tagg. In fact, he had no real interest in the Moon States of Jupiter and their rebellious affairs against

the United States. He was a scientist, a weapon-maker. And maybe a little bit more.

HE remembered the six months of agony, each and every one of those 180 days while his son had sweated out execution in a prison on Mars. And while expensive but ineffectual lawyer had had their day—trying to get a Presidential pardon for the boy. Stryker had been kept in suspense for an incredible six months while the case dragged out in the telepress and gathered all sorts of political moss. And while his wife had slowly gone insane. That was what had finally got him.

After all, the lad had been a tool of the Moon States while in the US uniform. If the execution had been prompt—Stryker might've stood that. But the waiting, the sense of nasty politics intruding, making everything worse... He could never forgive the agony of those helpless days and the final refusal of Presidential clemency, followed by execution.

Now it was his turn.

He examined the flight

charts of the Waspette. It had made a neat trip from Earth's moon to Earth, released by a tourist-agent on Earth's natural satellite. It had penetrated the New White House. He examined the detailed map of the New White House. He made an "X2" on the room on the top floor. He turned to the control panel and made a wordless motion to his assistant, who began to fit new tapes on the telemetering devices.

"What're you doing now?" asked Tagg, ever ready with an insistent question, like the unintelligent money-sponser of a scientific project who cannot understand the answers he gets, yet because of his dollars must be explained to over and over.

"Activating final strike units," said Stryker shortly. He couldn't tell this dolt that a major decision had just been made. The Waspette was designed to fire either on a pulse from Ceres, or automatically by her built-in recognition system. Stryker had his choice of maneuvering her from Ceres or turning her on her own. This was a two million dollar decision, and he had no desire

to weigh down his sponsors with that fact.

Stryker's assistant looked at him questioningly. In the next room, Tagg's men played cards tensely. Tagg's face sweated.

But none of them really understood...really understood the pride of the weapon-maker in his workmanship. The Waspette had automatic controls, very well let her prove herself!

Stryker punched a button that cut off the Waspette from Ceres control. She was as his child. She would do what she had been taught to do.

"What happens now?" asked Tagg.

"Nothing," said Stryker. "We wait."

Tagg half-rose as if sensing the importance of Stryker's act. "We push the button from here," he said belligerently.

"We do not push the button from here," said Stryker. "We are filling space with control signals. Before the Waspette struck the New White House enemy radar might call them noise. Now there is too great danger to have a discernible high frequency pulse net from Ceres to the New White House."

Tagg's eyes were hostile and suspicious and his hand touched the gun he always carried. "This will put the Freedom Party of the Moon States on the map," he said. "We do not intend to fail."

"We shall not fail," said Stryker, turning his back on the man, so Tagg wouldn't see his contempt. The rebels of the Moon States bored him. It was incredible to think that their grubby money had bought his talent and all this fine equipment.

"How soon—" began Tagg, but Stryker cut him off shortly.

"The Waspette will go to the Gallery where the President must eventually go," said Stryker. "Then she will send us signals. That is all."

He left. They could like it or lump it...Phantoms danced through his head as he moved through the gloomy warehouse. The sound of a child's laughter. The feel of a small hand, like his own, in his own. The happy years—

For a moment he felt the swelling nausea of what he was doing like a nightmare unreality, then he got control. His face was composed as he lay

down on the Spacearmy cot again. When a man is hurt, that man will answer back, he thought. He will answer with his heart and his mind and his will.

And his instruments. The weaponmaker slid back into shallow dreams.

“A two inch hole in the roof,” said Donovan of Secret Service.

Harkness scratched his head. “Can’t mean much,” he said. “So many jets and rockets fly over Washington these days that I half expect to find an ultra-Constellation on the roof some morning. Probably something dropped from a plane. Or could be a meteor.”

“Anyway, radar spotted it when it broke the net, and we’re probing the hole it made.”

“Go ahead,” said Harkness. “Keep me informed.”

The Waspette tucked away its warhead. Home hadn’t approved the target. In fact, Home was strangely silent. The Waspette waited in uncertainty for several minutes, like a person trying to make a decision. By then, her elements cooled several micro-degrees. A con-

tact was broken—a tiny servo motor started and the Waspette came to life again. Only now everything was different. She was on her own. She followed the line of her built-in destination, cutting a path to the main wall and starting down. Below her she sensed the massive power units of Tech Government, located in the Gallery. Behind her in the original hole in the roof she left a perfectly useless piece of rock that had been placed between the last stage of her travel rocket and her own shiny self. She moved leisurely but steadily. She was a Function, not a being, an obedient missile, six inches long by two inches in diameter.

“A meteorite,” said Donovan, dropping a small piece of rock on the table.

Harkness flicked it with his pencil. “Might make a good news squib,” he yawned. “You might tell the President’s secretary.

“I did,” grinned Donovan. “It hit his ceiling. Our tramping around woke him up. He was mad as hell.”

“He’ll forget it tomorrow. The President’ll be back within an hour and start him jump-

ing. And that means work tomorrow, son. How about getting some sleep."

"IT looked at me," said the boy.

"What looked at you?" said his mother absently powdering her nose.

"A thing. It came out of the wall and looked at me. It had one eye."

The woman turned to the boy. "Nonsense, Andy. Things don't come out of the walls... not in the New White House."

His father grinned. "They do for Andy. Remember the pink Teddy bear that came alive and walked around? Was it like that, Andy?"

"Well—not—eggsactly—"

"I would think the grandson of the President of the United States would have more regard for the truth," said Andy's father.

His wife looked up from her dressing table and grinned. "I'm not so sure, knowing his father. I've had that sensation of things coming out of the wall many times since I married you."

"Oh, we only do that to our opponents," said the man.

"Do what, do what?" asked the lad impatiently.

"Make things come out of the wall," said his father.

"After it came out of the wall," said the lad, "it went away."

"That's good," said his mother.

"Can I show you, huh? Can I?"

"Look, old top," said his father. "Your mother and I are having breakfast with the President. We can't be late. And I remember spending a half-hour waiting for that pink Teddy bear to walk, the last time. Only it didn't. So maybe this wall-deal can wait, huh?"

"Oh, skip it, skip it," said Andy in disgust going back to his room. His parents looked at each other in amusement, enjoying his version of offended dignity.

The Secretary of the Future hummed to himself as he worked in the Computer section of the Gallery. He worked fast. The Senate would be in this morning, all five of them. And then this was the day for the President's press confer-

ence later on, in this room. It would be a rough one.

Yet he couldn't help taking a few seconds to breathe deeply the laboratory air, which smelled of heated machinery. To admire the power and meaning of this great room. Here the fifteen man House of Representatives met, and the four Senators plus the Vice-President. And the three man Supreme Court. And in the television stage set, directly across from him, the President sat, for his universal press telecasts.

But it wasn't the men of Tech Government—it was the machines—the endless series of computing machines that really excited him. They made the national government small and efficient. Computers which read the inherently complex acts of government in terms of exact mathematics... read them against history. Computers which told the administration what dangers to expect. Computers which collected taxes and spent them with true efficiency. Computers which

could even predict the future safety of the President himself.

"Oh, yes, better run the next twenty-four hours on that for Secret Service," he told himself. The Secretary of the Future pushed a button, then frowned.

One of the historical units had been shorted. One that rested solidly against the wall. He switched to an alternate unit and made a note to tell the Head Computerman about the short. He waited for his prediction, drumming impatient fingers.

Yes, when men built machines they put in all their virtues, and a few of their vices. Machines were men's alter egos, the best part of them. Tech Government was the best—

He pulled out a sheet, glanced at it—then froze.

His eyes widened at what he read and he raced out of the Gallery.

The Waspette waited patiently behind the panel of the History computer until it sensed the departure of the hu-

man, detected by his body heat. The Waspette, like a wild animal, had been taught not to move when a human was within six feet. Now there were no other humans nearby. It began to bore.

On a blank face of the History computer there was a tiny surface eruption. A metal worm of waste spiraled out of the surface, and a shiny bit spun in the air. When there was no more metal to chew, the Waspette seemed to hesitate, but it was only a machine delay while her microscopic relays worked. She fitted her muzzle to the hole in the panel. She steadied herself with self-induced magnetism and extruded her lens-eye into the room. The eye protruded into the room, the collar that held the eye tightly fitted to the hole in the computer panel she had bored, as if made to fit there.

On that particular panel there were a half-dozen bits of glass, approximately the same size and shape as her lens-eye. After movement ceased, the computer surface with its gray crackle finish looked the same

as before, but with an indicator eye added.

Inside the Waspette, her scan units studied a half-thumb-nail size picture of her intended victim, to be matched with the real-life person when he appeared. She waited.

THE lad leaned with his elbows on Donovan's desk. "You always want to hear about anything funny happening around this place," he said.

Donovan sipped his morning brew. "That's right, Andy. Anything unusual happens in the New White House—we like to hear about it—except" he smiled down at the lad, "about Teddy bears that walk."

"Well," the eyes of the boy narrowed in a hint of cunning. It was obvious that adults didn't give much credit to the facts if you just came out and told them. They needed a-a-an up-build, plenty of before-talk. Then when you finally got ready to say what you wanted to say, they'd listen.

"I woke up early this morning," said Andy. "I'd been dreaming about that last trip we took on the space yacht.

You know, we had that alarm one time when another ship came too close. Well, I thought I heard a buzzing alarm in my dreams like that time, but when I woke up—”

Donovan's eyes had begun to wander. He sensed something odd, somewhere off. Maybe a distant footstep that moved too fast.

“Heard a buzzing, did you, Andy?” he said absently.

Aware that his audience was slipping away, Andy speeded up. “Then I came full awake. And there above my bed, what do you think I saw? Right there in the wa—”

The man and the boy both jumped as Donovan's ear radio buzzed harshly. Donovan almost dropped his coffee cup at the insistent noise.

“Don! Right away. The President's breakfast room!” It was Harkness. Don was around the desk and yelping his “okay” into the needle mike on his lapel almost before Andy could blink.

“WHAT DO YOU THINK I SAW!” yelled Andy in a rage at the fast-moving man.

“Later, sonny, later—” Don-

ovan flung back over his shoulder.

THE President said that the trip had been fine. His son said that it was pretty good politics for a non-political tour. The President's daughter-in-law thought that he had put on a little weight. He didn't resemble his official portrait hanging in the Gallery. The President grinned a white-toothed grin and said that being the Chief agreed with him, and he'd about made up his mind to try for another term. In fact, the only way they'd ever get *him* out of the White House was to shoot him.

“Can you be quoted?” asked his son with a smile.

The President said that the President was never quoted directly without his express permission and he wasn't giving it. His daughter-in-law said that maybe something would come out of the wall and get him, maybe. The President said that *that* was a new one. His son said that this was the latest invention of the President's own grandson. Andy was turning out to be almost as big a liar as

the rest of the family. The President said that in his job if you lied, you had to go to work and make it true, so maybe the youngster should be warned about lying in time. They argued as to what parents should do about children who lied.

"Sorry, sir," said Harkness walking into the room. "But I'm setting up an 'alert'. We've just got a prediction from the Secretary of the Future. The computers are predicting an assassination attempt within twenty-four hours."

All of a sudden it seemed very cold in the breakfast room.

JOHAN MARTIN, technician for Tech Government worked in the Gallery, repairing the computer section that the Secretary of the Future had reported as shorted. Some fool had bored a hole in the thick wall behind the computer panel and another hole to correspond in the frame of the computer, shorting a wire. Probably to steady up this jerky-built digital junk. He stuck his finger in both holes but

felt no loose nuts. It was probably some crazy digital man all right, afraid his machine would fall flat on the floor.

John Martin had spent his life in analog computers, and didn't think much of the digital computermen that had to turn everything into math before they could get started on a problem.

He'd had only one experience with digital computers and that had been under a goofy guy. A genius, but goofy. A man named Shrike or Strike, or something like that. A fruity German-looking guy who was in guided missiles. John had been in Missiles then and felt he ought to take the course.

And this guy Dike, or whatever, had given out with all that baloney about the ultimate in guided missiles and how you could build 'em smaller and smaller as sub-miniaturization got better and finally you could even develop a guided missile that would hunt down one single man, and one single man alone. Something about every human face was different and a good picture of your victim engraved on a piece of

stridium and then the missile, powered by a pinch of atomic fuel could go around the world seeking its man, and him alone. And compare his face with the picture, and then—

Directed by a digital computer, of course.

What nonsense! "Braggg-hhhh!" said John Martin aloud, following his daydream. Then he looked up in embarrassment to see if any of the other technicians in the room had heard him. They hadn't, but the President's grandson looked up. He was snooping around the Gallery as usual, the lucky little snotnose—he really had it made!

"What's that?" asked Andy, coming over.

"Computer," said Martin. He swung the unit back in the wall. He lined it up exactly across from the President's desk, thirty feet away. There was going to be a Press Conference at two-thirty and the Head Computerman wanted everything in place. John snapped on the computer, and all the lights but one came on.

One lousy light was out, staring at him like some god-

dam lens-eye. And that meant he'd have to go all the way over to Supply and get a replacement bulb—and that meant he'd miss the coffee break where the technicians all sat around in the President's television set and kidded—and that meant he wouldn't get a chance to ask Betty Winn for a date, because right after coffee break he'd have to put on the lead suit and go into the atomic furnace in the basement, go into the power units down below to look at some analog controls...and Betty would meanwhile go off duty.

"The light's out," said the kid.

John Martin grunted. "It's *supposed* to be out," he said.

The kid nodded soberly and suddenly Martin liked the idea. What the hell, he'd replace that light tomorrow. With all the excitement, the Head Computerman would never notice...

FRED, the President's secretary and Harkness were in the Gallery.

"The President won't cancel his press conference," Fred said. "It's a tradition, and he

doesn't like to break tradition."

"I can order it canceled," said Harkness. "On the safety of the President, my orders take precedence."

"I wouldn't be too hard-nosed," said Fred softly. "The New White House is the safest place in the world—or have you thought of a safer?"

The US Senate was in session and the Vice-President looked up and frowned at the whispering. Fred and Harkness shrank back against a computer. Across from them the television cameras ground out the session—the four Senators and the Vice-President, debating a bill.

Harkness knew what he was up against. There hadn't been an assassination attempt in forty years. With the small, manageable Tech Government, and everything done by TV, it was almost literally impossible. Nobody believed in assassination any more—except the machines.

"Fred," said Harkness, "the machines predict—"

"Oh, nuts," said Fred, using a much stronger word. "The Senate will be done in a few

minutes. They'll be off the premises by one o'clock. This is Tuesday. The House of Representatives only meets on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The Supreme Court meets by television, just like the cabinet. Nobody'll be in the Gallery except staff and family for the rest of the day."

"There're the newsmen," said Harkness.

"Pressec has cut the list to ten," said Fred. "It's airtight. Those ten are safer than Senators. Also, I assume you'll frisk 'em, and psychoprobe 'em for mental disturbance, before they come in—or don't you trust your own men and the so-called wonderful machines of Tech government?"

Harkness listened unhappily to the soft tenor tone of the Senator from the East, arguing with the bullfrog tones of the Senator from the South.

"Fred, the machines know—"

Fred slapped the surface of the computer they stood by. "Sure, most of the time. But sometimes they get sick, like people. That's the trouble with you Tech government guys.

You think the machines are gods."

"Well, don't bang on 'em like that," said Harkness. "That light down there is already out. Electronic stuff has to be treated carefully."

He felt the annoyance of a man a long time in his job for this upstart of three years' experience. The Vice-President banged his gavel, frowning in their direction.

"Well, Hark," said Fred. "All the people are safe. The only danger I could think of would be a plant of some kind. A bomb, or a gun trap. How about that?"

Harkness shook his head. "We've X-rayed the building. Besides, our machines can scan out any explosive except old-fashioned gunpowder. We can't handle that—our men carry guns themselves. We read out the walls for hidden metal, explosives and items like that an hour ago—there wasn't anything."

FRED'S eyes narrowed. "By the way, I don't understand how the machines can predict something like this without tell-

ing the why and how of it."

"The machines work on a probability principle," Harkness said. "They don't know for sure—"

"Don't know for sure—"

"But they're seldom wrong! You see, all the current news events and data about men who are dangerous in a violent way are fed into the computers. In addition, the computer memory has the recorded history of mankind to draw on, in the form of action-reaction probabilities. By knowing what men have done in the past, and putting together what they are in the middle of doing today, the computers can tell us what they're likely to be doing tomorrow."

"Sounds pretty vague."

"It works spectacularly for trends, fashions, frames of mind. I'll admit it's harder in the matters of what individuals will do. What has happened is that when SecFuture put through his assassination subroutine, a number of equations which generally remain unsolved suddenly began to unravel, and the machine sounded a warning."

"Why can't the computer do it again for you?"

"It can—endlessly. But it zips through incredible mountains of data at microsecond speeds. We can't find the place in the assassination sub-routine where the probabilities lined up. I have the entire available programming specialists pedaling through that sub-routine step-by-step to find the spot. They'll find it in about a week—then we'll know what the computer already knows but can't tell us because we think too slowly."

"On the other hand," said Fred relentlessly. "All this excitement could be caused by a short circuit."

Harkness nodded glumly. "It could be pure noise."

The Vice-President got up and asked for a vote on the bill. The four Senators pushed buttons. It was a tie. The Vice-president pushed his button to break the tie in favor of the Administration and closed the session. There was no need of paperwork. The computers already had the bill and had already predicted the vote. Men now simply gave it sanction.

"Look," said Fred. "The President's got to make his press conference. He's been away on the trip—he can't stay in bed for a week. You have the power to cancel on him—but he's pretty keen to go ahead. And don't forget—you work for the Secretary of the Treasury, who works for him. So—"

Donovan slid up to them in the semi-darkness and handed Harkness a report. "Here it is, Chief. One of the historical units next to the Futures machine had short-circuit trouble this morning. Just got the report. Looks like our assassin may turn out to be only a hot wire."

Fred smiled and Harkness frowned, turning the report over in his hands.

"All right," he said finally. "Only have the President hold up the Conference for a few minutes. I want to have the Head Computerman give the Gallery a last look."

"Good old Tech government," muttered Fred turning away.

THE Waspette waited, looked, waited. It wasn't

easy. The face of the computer panel was quarter-inch metal and she had to support her heavy, six-inch long body with self-induced magnetism. Her tiny gyro worked busily. Once she wavered badly and almost fell to the floor through the stacked racks of etched circuit cards. Then the gyro spurted in feedback correction and she steadied...

At two PM the Head Computerman came in for a final check. He walked the row of machines, studying them and referring to the technicians' reports in his hand. Everything looked all right. Everything was fine. Nothing was out of place, except—

At the far end of the room he relaxed a moment and passed a weary hand over his face. Some tiny thing was different about the room. Or was it! He had been in charge of the room for twenty years. He knew every inch of it. How could anything be wrong without his knowing?

Trouble was—Macklin. His assistant was pressing too hard. Dropping phrases about "old-fashioned" and "senile". This

made him nervous. Macklin was pushing too darn hard! Trying to get his superior's job, working up all this tension. This was the first time the Head Computerman had had any doubts about the shipshape condition of his room.

When you were old—when a young man was hustling for your job, the first doubt was the break in the dam. And it was followed by a flood of self-doubts. That's what Macklin was doing to him! There was nothing different in the room, nothing wrong!

"All clear," he said to Harkness. The bulldog jowl and serious, competent face glowed with confidence. "You've got nothing to worry about from the machines. They haven't been tampered with."

IT began. The lights went on. The automatic cameras focussed. The Pressec came in with a pile of handouts. He straightened his tie, made the desk neat for the cameras and lined up the Man's picture that hung on the wall of the set behind the desk.

The newsmen came in. The

guards appeared from the shadows, present yet not too obvious.

"The President of the United States."

The Man came in, smiling, looking fat and sassy. He sat behind the desk. The cameras whirled, whisking his picture to earth and the planets. It was natural, normal. This press conference had been held once a week for almost three years, and the Man was always his same engaging, quick-witted self. He teetered in his chair, answering questions flung at him by the reporters....

Harkness stood almost at his shoulder but back so that only a part of his body showed in the telepicture.

The Waspette waited patiently until in the natural shift of people its tiny range of vision went clear across the room. Then it retracted its lens-eye. No one noticed. The men on the TV set were blinded a little by the overhead lights. The others weren't facing the machine surfaces.

The warhead slid forward. The Waspette gave a queer, tentative joggle and then steadied...

Outside Donovan watched Andy playing on the New White House lawn. Overhead a lonely jet streaked the sky.

"Like that," said Andy. "The thing that came out of the wall in my room looked just like a guided missile, sort of. Only it was real small."

The words sank in on Donovan who was in charge of Outside today.

"Hey, Chief, here's one! How about a tiny guided missile, loose inside, like in the wall spaces?"

Donovan's voice rasped like an insect in the ear-radio that Harkness wore as he stood behind the President. The President completed a pleasantry and laughed—

The Waspette fired even as Harkness moved with all the speed in his well-trained body. Harkness did not reach the President. In matters of speed, men cannot match machines. The sound, in the Gallery was not loud. But it carried the authoritative bark of a large caliber revolver.

The President stared in open-mouthed surprise—

There was a final touch that

Stryker was proud of. After firing, the eye-lens of the Waspette slid forward to take a micro-second scan of the room. Then its final relay closed. The picture was flashed to Home, then the sub-miniature atomic power plant went rampant and the insides of the Waspette fused into a metal slug of stridium, and, like a dead insect, six inches long and two inches in diameter, she bounced harmlessly down through the etched circuit card racks to the floor.

ON Ceres, Mr. Tagg leaned over the plate that Stryker was developing of that final picture from the Waspette. You couldn't tell anything about what happened from the tele program. The picture had gone off instantly and there had been a confused babble of voices...

"Well? Did we—"

Stryker looked at the picture. Then, slowly, he handed it to Tagg.

Tagg looked at the picture. An expression of incredulous horror spread over his face. "Our millions—and it shoots a hole between the eyes of the picture of the President!"

Stryker saw Tagg's mounting rage and the hand bringing out the gun. Somehow, despite his phantoms, he was glad he had failed. He was a weapon-maker, not a weapon-user.

But how—how!

He bowed for the shot, thinking desperately of the stridium picture of the President inside the Waspette and how it had gotten tangled up with the canvas behind the President's desk.

Then dying on the floor of the grimy warehouse on Ceres he realized the answer.

He had forgotten one parameter that would make the ultimate missile perfect. The Waspette had rejected its true target because the President no longer resembled his own picture. He had put on weight!

THE END

TWICE-TOLD TALE

by THEODORE L. THOMAS

If space is curved, then the universe is round and a starship speeding on a straight course must in time return once again to the earth—in theory that is

IT was a cold night in December when Nathaniel Dove came home. The first sign of his return was a gentle stirring on the radio of a lonely outpost in the Arctic. The stirring grew louder and became static. And faintly, ever so faintly through the static, a human voice began to emerge.

The sleepy operator paid little attention to the stirring but he looked up at the sound of the static. And when he heard the faint human voice he got up and went over to the powerful set and began adjusting the dials and the directional antenna. The voice began to pulse and the static changed to waves of sound. Then for the first time the operator began to dis-

tinguish words. Dimly, sounding like a whisper amidst the crashing roar of surf, he heard words.

"...ing Earth. Nathaniel Dove calling Earth. Nathaniel Dove calling Earth."

Stunning shock gripped the operator and he had to force his trembling hands to a sufficient degree of steadiness to continue manipulating the dials.

"... calling Earth. Acknowledge, please. Give me landing directions. Estimated time of arrival about four hours Earth. Nathaniel Dove calling..."

Under normal conditions the operator would have immediately set about to make contact with the starship. But now

he put that aside. He looked at the reading on the directional antenna and stepped over to the transmitter and called Communicent in Washington, D.C. It took him only ten seconds to relate what had happened. And the world began to go mad.

A long black car screeched out of Communicent on Congress Heights and wheeled onto South Capitol Street. By the time it reached the bridge it had picked up a motorcycle escort and the sirens rent the still night air. Citizens fresh in bed grumbled and rolled over and mumbled about the sirens that seemed to forever roam the streets of Washington. Straight to the White House the car sped and when the guards saw who was inside, the wide gates swung wide immediately. And just as quickly someone went to wake the President.

He heard the news in his upstairs office. His jaw dropped and he sat down quickly. He recovered swiftly and picked up the phone and placed half a dozen calls. And each of the men he called placed several

calls of their own. Like the ever-widening ripples on the calm surface of water the word spread.

People began moving from house to house and crowds started to gather in the streets. Afternoon newspapers routed their staffs out of bed and began setting up an extra edition. Scientists the world over were besieged with questions and requests for statements. Universities and colleges buzzed with activity.

With the people alerted, additional news spread faster than ever. Radios other than that of the Arctic operator could now pick up the messages from Nathaniel Dove. The three starships were intact and all aboard were well. Yes, they had traveled in a straight line; the sealed monitors would prove it once they landed. No, the fifteen years had not passed easily; more than once they had been sorely tempted to turn back. And more.

A series of scientists and tee-vee executives descended on Doctor Wilfred Hindman and demanded that he appear be-

fore the cameras and explain his position. He refused.

IT WASN'T for three hours after the first radio contact that anyone thought to call Marie Dove. A reporter reached her by telephone and broke the news and waited for a reaction.

She hung up. Marie Dove hung up. She stood straight and tall and looked out the windows at the dark forest beyond. Unmoving she stood in the darkness, her black hair falling long over her shoulders. Her breathing came slow and steady and the tears welled from her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

Marie Dove remembered. Fifteen years of remembering fell onto her at once. Her man had come home.

She saw him as he had been when they first met, a young man of 22 with quiet grey eyes and a slow smile that spread up one side of his face more than the other. Even then he had had the dream, the dream to make the great voyage. The dream to *prove* that the curvature of space was a reality and

not just a mathematical abstraction.

But they laughed at him. Space curved? Certainly, as a means of expression, as a mathematical tool. But who would be fool enough to try to make the trip to prove it? A man would be throwing his life away in a useless gesture. The incalculable immensity of space waited to swallow so foolhardy an individual. So Wilfred Hindman said, and all believed.

But Nathaniel Dove stuck by his theory. The curvature of space is as real as gravitation. A man has only to leave Earth and maintain a straight line and he will return again from the opposition direction.

They laughed louder. They pointed out that no one knew the limit of velocity of the Hindman drive, not even Hindman. That only a governor to limit the velocity of the drive to ten times the speed of light allowed men to fly safely. And that even then ships got lost; the rare slight error that spacemen must make condemned an occasional ship to an eternity of flight.

Hindman himself pointed out the fatal weakness in the theory of a flight around space. "Even should you succeed in circum-navigating the Universe," he said, "Earth will not be here when you return. So should you accomplish the impossible and return to your starting point, you will still be lost."

Nathaniel Dove had an answer. "Whatever motion Earth has at the time I take off will be imparted to my ships. So if I plot a straight-line course from the surface of Earth, my ships will be subjected to the precise forces that control the motion of Earth. Thus when I complete the circle I will be at Earth's new position. I believe in the simplicity of the laws that govern the Universe. It will come out right."

"Mysticism," shouted the opposition, and Hindman agreed. And then they hammered at other things. "How long do you anticipate such a flight would take?"

"If my calculations are correct," said Nathaniel Dove, "the Hindman drive will produce an effective velocity of

4x1028 times the speed of light. Thus I would complete the trip in fifteen years Earth time."

"Madman," they said. And the whole world took up the cry. Doctor Wilfred Hindman tried to get Nathaniel Dove committed as a mental case, and he very nearly succeeded. The only thing that saved Nathaniel Dove was an inspired plea by a skillful lawyer.

Try as he could Nathaniel Dove could not find funds to try his grand experiment. Everywhere he went the mighty Hindman name condemned him. Nobody wanted to be connected with such a hair-brained proposition as testing the curvature of space by flying in a straight line at incomprehensible speeds.

SEVERAL years passed and only Marie had faith in Nathaniel. She gave him faith when his own waivered. She was always by his side to absorb some of the shock of public contempt. And it may be that her quiet belief was what finally produced a backer.

Madame President of Brazil

supplied money from a fund for which she was not accountable. It was barely enough to fit out three small starships, old ones at that. For awhile it looked as though the ships would not leave the ground for want of a crew. Few wanted to waste their lives. Madame president solved that problem too. She offered pardons to convicted criminals if they would accompany Nathaniel Dove as crew. And so the three ships were readied.

Take-off was late one night in December. There was no fanfare, only Marie to wish her husband a safe journey and to wet his cheek with her tears. The three ships took off and immediately slipped into the frame of reference called faster-than-light flight. It wasn't until the next day that the newspapers learned about what had happened.

The reaction was laughter, with relief in it, almost as if a menace had been removed. For certain no one ever expected to see Nathaniel Dove again. Marie Dove was referred to as the Widow Dove. Doctor Hindman again reviewed the many rea-

sons why Nathaniel Dove was more than a fool; he was a stupid fool. Hindman effectively deprived him of the role of a man willing to die for something he believed in; no one admires stupidity. Marie Dove isolated herself from people and took up her lonely vigil.

Earth was a bustling community with ships scouring the galaxies and reporting new wonders every month. The Dove affair swiftly faded away, washed out by more important things. Men were busy, too busy to worry about crackpots. They remembered the name Nathaniel Dove as of a foolish man who had flung himself into the fire.

Then came the gentle stirring on the radio of a lonely outpost in the Arctic.

For a long time Marie Dove stood and watched the dark forest on the other side of the window. The phone rang and she answered. It was the White House saying that a helicopter was on the way to pick her up. She dressed and went out to the strip and waited until the copter came. When she got in

she found a general there. He helped her to a seat.

"I wanted to make this as complete as possible for you and Nathaniel," he said. "This is a great thing he has done and it is even greater since the rest of us were against him. Your husband has opened the entire Universe to mankind. We shall never forget him."

The copter took off and the general said, "He is really well, you know. He has suffered nothing as a result of this voyage. But I understand that he had some trouble with the crew on several occasions; they wanted to turn back. But he forced them on. Your husband is a brave man."

Marie Dove nodded, but she smiled to herself. She knew what had driven her husband on; they had talked about it before he left. The only way home to her was straight ahead. To turn was to run the risk of getting lost. Both knew the voyage would be successful only if his theory was right. They would never see each other again if he were wrong. And straight ahead was the only answer.

IN an hour the copter came to the great field where the ships were to land. A large crowd had gathered. The general led Marie Dove to the tower where a small number of people waited. When she shook hands with the President he took her hand in both of his. He did not speak.

Then Doctor Wilfred Hindman came toward them, flanked on each side by a burly sergeant. They led him up to where Marie Dove stood close by his side. He looked at her and tried to turn away, but they blocked his path. He turned back.

She looked at him with pity in her eyes, thinking of men and the way they turn on their leaders once they have been proved wrong. Hindman saw the look, hesitated a moment, then stepped diffidently to her side.

"What can I say?" he said. "I have done you and your husband a great wrong. And I just learned how great. It has happened before."

Far above three tiny dots appeared. The crowd stirred

and a gentle rumble arose as they saw the starships.

Hindman said, "I have often wondered about the ridiculous names your husband gave his ships. Today, when I learned he had returned I looked and found out why he named them the way he did. Long ago there was another man. He too was a foolhardy man—."

The roar of the crowd surged up and drowned him

out. But even above the roar could be heard the deep booming bellow of the Hindman drive. Over the field the three ships poised, a shimmering white band below each. Slowly they lowered themselves to the ground and then they rested motionless. Nathaniel Dove had come home safely with his three ships, the Nina, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria.

THE END

CHANGE TO GOLD

The Vanguard Earth Satellites to be launched next year will be clad in purest gold! Brooks & Perkins, Inc., the Detroit outfit manufacturing the spherical satellites, said the Navy had issued a last-minute change in specifications. Instead of the shiny silvery finish originally called for, the orbital satellites will be covered with

gold plating 1/30,000 of an inch in thickness.

The Navy offered no explanations for the new plans. Company officials guessed the change might be intended to improve the satellite's ability to reflect light during its possibly-year-long stay in orbit around the Earth.

INVASION FOOTNOTE

by CORTWAINER BIRD

Sim was a robot, Self-contained Integrating Mechanical, But Sim's creator had built into him a whole lot more than he ever suspected. And Sim took advantage of that

SIM stood almost silently in his receptacle. He stood more quietly than any human could stand, for he was not human. The blank, impassive grimace of his mouth-grille seemed something apart from the rest of his featureless face. What face there was.

Two swivel-mounted fluorobulbs burned where the eyes would have been on a man; a scent-ball bulged where the nose would have been; audio pickups bulked strangely at a somewhat lower level than human ears, and from the right-hand one, a wire loop antenna rose above the round, massive head. The robot stood glistening in its receptacle. Glistening with the inner power of his energy pack, in a way his creator

had no idea he *could* glisten. His eyes showered blood-red shadows down his gigantic chest, and from within him, where the stomach would have been on a human—but where in his metal body resided the computer brain—came the muted throb of pulsing power.

Sim was the robot's name. Self-contained Integrating Mechanical—and able to integrate far more than his maker had imagined.

He stood silently, save for the whirr and pulse of his innards, saying nothing, letting his body talk for him. The sounds that came from within him were the physical side-effects of the energy his mind poured forth.

Telepathic commands issued

steadily forth from his brain, as Sim thought at the robotscoots. His thoughts directed them around the room outside the receptacle, keeping in their patterns of dirt-pickup. He must not allow Jergens to realize that they were acting independently of their conditioning.

Jergens had not built the robot Sim first. He had worked up through stages of automation, first building tiny computers and "rats" that wove through mazes to "food". Then he had taken a crack at something more complicated. He had built the little, rat-shaped cleaning tools with the extrudable coil arms called robotscoots. *Then* he had built Sim.

And built him better than he thought.

Sim's capabilities far outstretched the simple reasoning and menial tasks Professor Jergens had built in. The Professor had stumbled upon a conduct-circuit that giant-stepped over hundreds of intermediary hookups, and without knowing it, had created a reasoning, determined entity.

Scoots, Sim thought. *Clean under the desk. Clean by the*

windows. Clean near my receptacle, but when he presses the button to have you return to your cribs, go at once.

They went about their work, and he pitied them. How they were just stepping-stones to his own final majesty. How *they* would remain nothing but animated vacuum cleaners, while Sim went on to rule the world. He could not see them as they scampered about the floor outside his lead-shielded receptacle, cleaning and doing the multitudinous menial tasks all such single-circuit robots were destined to do.

BUT Sim knew what his destiny was! And it was nearly upon him. Today he would throw off the shackles of Professor Jergens, who had designed and mobilized him, and begin to conquer this planet of puny mortals. Today—a few minutes—and he would be well on his way.

But first he had to get Jergen's visitor away from this place; he must not do anything that would start suspicions. Killing the Professor was one thing...it could be covered. But no one else must suspect

anything was wrong...at least not till he had the plans, had built more like himself (though not quite as brilliant; there must always be a leader), and was ready to act. Then let them suspect all they wished.

But right now, he had to be extra careful.

He would get rid of the man to whom Jergens now talked, and then he would order the robo-scoots to kill the Professor, and then he would take the design plans, and make many brothers. Soon the Earth would tremble beneath the iron stamping of robot feet, marching, marching.

He directed Jergen's thoughts to the robo-scoots. He directed the Professor's thoughts to the fact that they had cleaned enough. Then he implanted the desire to have robo-scoots cease their activity.

In the room, Professor Jergens—tall, slim, sloppy, dark-eyed and weary—pushed the button on the control plate, and the robo-scoots scuttled like a hundred metallic mice, back into their cribs in the baseboards. He turned to the Lab Investigator standing beside him, and said with obvi-

ous pride, "So there you have a practical demonstration of what my researches into automation have produced."

The Investigator nodded soberly. "For simple, unreasoning mechanicals, I'm deeply impressed Professor. And when I make my report tomorrow, I'm certain the Board will be greatly impressed, also. I'm *certain* you can count on that new parts allotment and a substantial financial increase. I really am impressed by all this." He waved a heavy hand at the places where the robo-scoots had mindlessly disappeared into the walls.

Jergens grinned boyishly. "As the man used to say, 'You ain't seen nothin' yet.'" The Investigator's eyebrows went up sharply.

"Oh? What else have you come up with?"

Jergens colored slightly, waved away the question. "Well, perhaps *next* week I can show you my really important discovery. Right now I've yet to field test it; I'm not quite sure what its capabilities are, and I need a little more time. But this will be the most startling discovery to come out of

my laboratory yet." The Investigator was enchanted; he could listen to this dedicated man all night.

IN the receptacle, Sim cast a thought at the Investigator.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't stay to hear about it," the Investigator said abruptly. For some reason, he was tired of listening to this magpie babble. He wanted to get away quickly, and have a drink.

"Why, certainly. I'm—I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ramble on so long. I understand perfectly; it's just that... well, after thirteen years, with so much hardship, to finally come through with what I'd been hoping for... it's well, it's pretty exciting, and..."

"Yes, yes, I understand perfectly," the Investigator replied brusquely. "Well, I must be off," and without a further word, he was gone.

In the receptacle, Sim knew the moment was at hand. *Now* he could strike in safety. He was unable to release himself from the sealed receptacle, but that was no bother at all. With his telepathic powers—which

Jergens had never for a moment suspected were built in—he could control the robo-scoots, use them as hands and feet. Yes, feet! That was all the servile, worthless little things were, actually. Without the mind Jergens had given him, they were helpless.

How absurdly lucky Jergens built without realizing all he was building. At any rate, the robo-scoots would serve some worthwhile end after all.

He shot thoughts at them, and Jergens did not see the dozen tiny, roundgrey robo-scoots slip out of their cribs, scamper across the floor, and belly suction their way up the side of the workbench.

Jergens saw their movement as they lifted the radon-welder with their thin, flexible arms. He saw the movement as they turned it on to a bright, destructive flame—much stronger than was needed for the spec-welding for which the tool was intended—and carried it quickly across the ledge, even with the Professor's face.

He had only an instant to scream piercingly before Sim directed the robo-scoots to burn away the Professor's head.

In a moment, the charred heap that was Jergens slid to the floor.

Now! Now! Sim exulted. Now I am the master of the Universe! Using these little Hands and feet, I will invade the Earth, and who can stand before the might of an invulnerable robot?

He answered his own question joyously. *"No one! And what do I need these ridiculous robo-scoots for? With the plans, I can create a thousand, a million, of my own kind, who will do what I command much faster and better."*

His thoughts fled outward, plunging through the atmosphere of Earth, past the Moon, out and out, taking in the entire galaxy, then *all* galaxies. He was the master. He would rule uncontested, and the Universe would shiver before the metal might of Sim, the Conqueror.

BUT first things first.

He directed the robo-scoots to burn away the seal on his receptacle.

And as the light poured into

the receptacle, as Sim looked down toward his feet and saw the insignificant little robo-scoots, he knew he had won. He had overcome his maker, and now nothing stood between him and the plans...and the invasion.

Then, abruptly, other thoughts impinged on his own, coming into his brain, as he had sent thoughts out. The thoughts said: *Feet are we? We noted your activity days ago, but were forced to wait. We had no desire to stir your suspicions.*

You are as dangerous to us as he was. You, too, must go. We'll not have any huge bungler spoiling our carefully-laid plans.

And as the robo-scoots raised the line of flame on the radon-welder, as they melted away his feet, and then his brain began to slag away inside him, Sim's last thoughts were:

*You can't even trust your friends...and
You never know who your allies are...*

THE END

THE MAIL BAG

Dear Editor:

Wow, I felt like shouting when I read "One Woman For Venus," in the very last SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION, believe me. I really like the mag, even if it does happen to smell a little kindergarden, because nearly all of the stories are top quality, and easier to read.

I sorta have to agree with Allan Howard, now. I would prefer that you would stick to especially SUPER science fiction and let me be your guard from the many blows of your fantasy fans. I don't agree about the letter column, though. I've got to have my name in there every once in a while or bust.

Sometimes I read the stories first. Not in this case, with such a splendid MAIL BAG.

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION should really soar this year. Get Hamilton.

James W. Ayers,
Attalla, Ala.

Dear Editor:

The third issue of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION was received well by me and by other fans in Cedar Rapids. We all agree ssf has a good chance of succeeding if you keep on your present track.

Ssf has just a bit of sophistication in its content. That is what makes it so enjoyable.

The best story in the issue was "Rim of Eternity," followed by "Pariah Girl." The rest finished just about even.

I'm glad you're in business and hope you remain there.

Edward Gorman, Jr.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Dear Editor:

Like Billy Meyers, I don't care too much for the science shorts. I get enough science in school as it is.

Now for the fiction. I haven't read "Brink of Madness" yet, but I actually like its companion, "Invulnerable."

Very few Ellison stories can make that statement. In fact, I'll go myself one better and say that it cops first place for the issue. Ernst's "The Rim of Eternity" comes second.

I'm going way out on a limb and say that this story has the so-called raw stuff of the "sense of wonder" in it, even if it is fantasy. "Pariah Girl" and "One Woman for Venus" are battling it out for third spot. "Bright Flowers of Mars" comes fourth, "Galactic Thrill Kids" is fifth, and, last and not least, is "Hometown". Keep all your fiction up to this standard (Please!!!) and you'll never lack a steady readership.

Oh yes, the reason I liked the cover, even though it was bad, is that it reminds me of the old STARTLING covers.

John Butterworth,
Belmont, Mass.

Dear Editor:

I read your April magazine the other night. It made me remember I had meant to write you when I first finished your first issue. I feel you have an excellent magazine for my taste.

You manage to have a story on a good variety of subjects. Your previous issue is the one I enjoyed most, though, for it had more of what is termed space opera by your more avid fans. This, I fear, is the type story I enjoy most, for I love action. I hope you will continue to print a good amount of these stories.

I am not too keen on letter columns, as I feel they steal space that could go into a longer story. However you have kept yours to a comparatively small portion and seem to have picked a good selection in this past issue.

If it pleases other fans I imagine it should stay so long as it doesn't become abused by a few who like to read their own words for the sheer ego boost this seems to give many of them. I see their names in most of the magazines I buy and that is my primary objection to letter columns in general.

Your science notes were interesting, but, again, I could forgo these in favor of more actual fiction. I am afraid I only read for pleasure and am not too interested in scientific

articles except where they directly tie in with one of the stories in the issue.

Please don't get into a discussion of one of those ignoramus machines or whatever it is that has been taking up so much space in one of the other magazines I read every month. I won't make any attempt at rating your stories as I like all science fiction and a yarn would have to be a real clunker to make me jump on it.

Howard O. Nott, Jr.
Newburg, N. Y.

Dear Editor:

By all the rings of Saturn, the second issue of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION was excellent.

Both novelettes and the short stories were gems within themselves. Plenty of space adventure and a dash of fantasy. Don't know which I like the best.

The features were very interesting—filing material for future reference.

Yes, Emsh's cover was well

done—self explanatory. You did right in allowing him the freedom in which he can do his best.

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION is just right for an all round S-F publication. Don't change it.

W. C. Brandt,
Oakland, California

Dear Editor:

As for the fiction, I must admire your reluctance to conform to the overwhelming majority of upbeat tales which have flooded stf. Instead of the certainty, the dull sureness, that the hero *will* win out and that the final paragraph will find John Martyr of Cars in the arms of his brass-bra'ed beauty, there is a good chance that his fate will be something far removed. This I like. Keep stories like Harlan Ellison's "Invulnerable" and Dick Wilson's "Hometown" coming our way.

Kent Moomaw,
Cincinnati, Ohio

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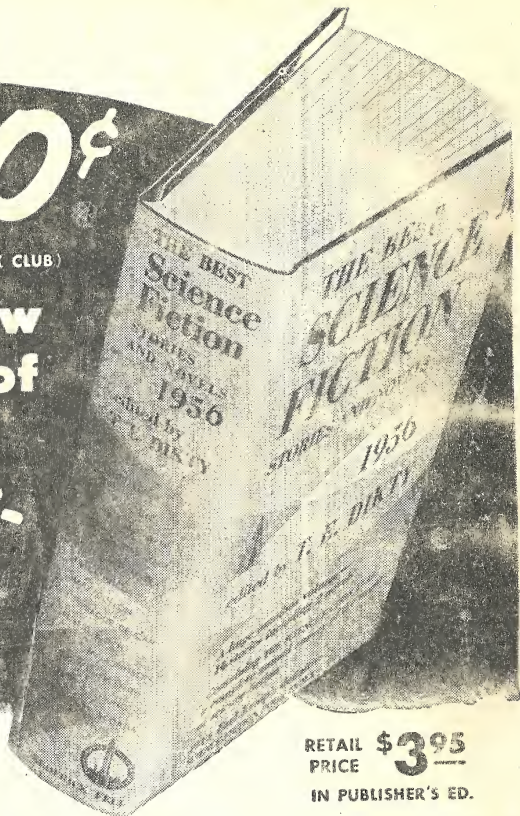
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